PURSUING A DREAM AT MIDLIFE: SELF-DIRECTION OF WRITERS WITH THEIR FIRST PUBLISHED NOVEL

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

JENNIFER MURRAY

DISSERTATION ADVISOR: DR. MICHELLE GLOWACKI-DUDKA

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

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Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 2015

DEDICATION

In memory of Patrick Murray, my dad. You have a daughter who is a doctor now!

This is dedicated to those who dream of being a writer. Listen to the voices in your head!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Earning a doctorate is a long journey. I would like to thank those who supported me and encouraged me during this process. My committee members provided many suggestions to help me refine my research. Thank you, Dr. Bo Chang, Dr. Wilfridah Mucherah, and Dr. Dom Caristi. Thanks especially to my committee chair, Dr. Michelle Glowacki-Dudka. Your patient prodding and encouragement were just what I needed on those many times when I felt stuck.

Along the way, I have met many doctoral students ahead of me whose stories encouraged me and I hope that I have been of help to those I met who are still striving to attain this achievement. Just before the dreaded comprehensive examination, Kelly Kirkwood reached out, asking for someone going through the process to meet with her for mutual support. Many hundreds of Facebook messages later, we have both made it. Congratulations, Dr. Kirkwood, and thanks!

Many friends and family members have also offered support, most especially my mom, Sharon Murray, and my best friend, Lisa Carter Salinas. You both have been with me through it all. Thanks for believing in me when I was having doubts. And though you were only with me during the last part of the journey, thanks to Michael Douglas Cosgrove for being there and making the journey so much more enjoyable.

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Pursuing a Dream at Midlife: Self-Direction of Writers with Their First Published Novel

STUDENT: Jennifer Murray

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The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of writing and publishing a first novel. Using a phenomenological method, influenced by van Manen (1990), I sought to uncover the meaning of this experience in adults over 40 years old (ages ranged from 40-80) and examined how this influenced their motivation and self-direction. Nine novelists were interviewed. Six of these participants were female and three were male. Of these novelists, six chose to have their novels self-published. One had her novel accepted by a large publishing company, and the two others published their novels through small publishing companies. During data analysis, four themes emerged: (a) influence of the writer's subject/object orientation; (b) motivation found in story, process, and goals; (c) meaning found in experience and accomplishment; and (d) lessons learned.

In Garrison's (1997) comprehensive model of self-directed learning, self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation are necessary components for developing into a fully self-directed learner. In this study, self-monitoring was an issue with some of the participants. Developing the ability to seek and to integrate external feedback with internal feedback did not come easily to some of the participants. One self-published novelist, in particular, struggled in

her ability to judge the integrity of the self-publishing company to make decisions in her best interest. The ability to develop self-monitoring skills is especially crucial for authors who choose to self-publish.

When deciding to write a novel, and especially if considering self-publishing, an aspiring author should consider closely his or her reasons for wishing to write and publish the novel to determine a learning plan. Facilitators of writing courses and workshops can help aspiring authors to practice self-monitoring and to assess the differences between their current knowledge and skill levels and their goals, so that they can develop a self-directed plan.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> But what does it take to become a published writer? It is often a long and arduous journey that requires dedication to learning the craft of fiction and a willingness to learn how to navigate the business of the publishing world, a world that is changing rapidly as a result of emerging technologies and the influence of globalization. (Gouthro, 2014a, p. 175)

The preceding quote illustrates the need for learning and perseverance if a writer is to succeed. The daunting task of writing and rewriting a two- or three-hundred page novel manuscript has left many aspiring novelists paralyzed by writer's block (Keyes, 1995). Then there is the agonizing wait for publication. What quality of motivation did Dick Wimmer possess for him to endure 162 rejections over the course of 25 years until his novel *Irish Wine* was finally published in 1989 (Hievsi, 2001)? What did *Irish Wine* mean to him that he was so determined not only to write it, but to ensure that the world could read it? Many people think that they want to be a writer someday, but often feel overwhelmed by the size of the project; they either give up or never even begin. Many books have been written to coax the aspiring writer to sit down and write—one page at a time (e.g., Cameron, 1998; Goldberg, N., 1986/2005; Keyes, 1995; Ueland, 1938/1987).

This dissertation explored the stories of authors who became first-time published novelists during middle or late adulthood. The purpose of this study was to examine these stories in order to discover the meaning that writers place on the process of writing their first novel, and to better understand their motivation and self-directed learning in this process.

Merriam and Simpson (2000) stated, “If you want to understand a phenomenon, uncover the meaning a situation has for those involved, or delineate process—how things happen—then a qualitative design would be most appropriate” (p. 99). Since both the process and the personal meanings the novelists hold regarding their journeys to publication were part of this study, a qualitative study was most appropriate.

Writing can be a solitary activity. Writers often function outside of formal learning contexts and must decide for themselves what they need to learn, and how to set goals and stay motivated (Gouthro, 2014a, 2014b). This study built on research about self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, meaning or purpose, motivation, and personal learning projects. While there has been research on how adults become motivated to undertake learning projects, as well as on the characteristics and processes of self-directed learners (e.g., McGregor & Little, 1998), these studies have often been set within formal learning contexts, such as pursuing higher education or providing instructors with tips for fostering self-direction in their learners (e.g., Brockett, 1994; Hiemstra & Brockett, 1994). Gouthro (2014a, 2014b) studied published writers using a life history approach in the context of lifelong learning and citizenship. These writers included bestselling authors and many more who had developed readerships but supplemented their writing with other income-earning careers. This current study included a few traditionally published novelists, but most of the participants were self-published novelists. Most struggled to find readers outside of their family and friends. Furthermore, this study focused on the particular experience of writing and publishing that first novel, although earlier background information was learned as part of the interview process. There is a need for research on how adults become engaged in larger, personally meaningful projects, such as writing a novel. An understanding of

the meaning adults place on this process will be useful to adult education practitioners who work with adults who have various goals of their own.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover how individuals in middle or later adulthood pursue the goal of writing and publishing a novel. Writing a novel is a goal of many people, but few achieve it. Keyes (1995) researched the writings of authors in order to uncover patterns of fear that had the potential to paralyze writers and lead to self-sabotaging actions. He identified fear of failure, fear of success, fear of failure after success, fear of exposing dark secrets of the family or of the writer's own mind, and fear of having nothing important or interesting to write, among others as the fears that stop writers from reaching for the pen or keyboard. For the non-writing writer, the dream remains alive by talking about the story that will one day be written. "This approach is nearly guaranteed to keep one from actually doing it. Fiction writers find that telling stories usually dissipates the energy needed to write them" (Keyes, 1995, p. 94). This study included participants who chose to sit down to write, who did more than wish or dream of being a writer but took the steps to achieve their goal. They put their energy into writing down their story instead of just talking about it to others.

In Garrison's (1997) comprehensive model of self-directed learning, he noted three areas that integrate for successful self-direction: self-management, self-monitoring, and motivational processes. The key to motivation is finding personal meaning in the activity and believing in one's ability to complete the task successfully. Phenomenological research focuses on discovering the meaning of lived experiences of a particular phenomenon for the participants (van Manen, 1990). This study sought to uncover the meaning that these adults placed on their

first published novel, how this meaning guided them through the self-directed process of successfully completing this novel, and what they learned along the way.

Research Questions

This study explored the phenomenon of the process of these particular adults writing and publishing their novels. In doing so, it focused on these questions:

1. What meaning does the author place on the experience of writing and publishing the first novel?
2. How did this meaning influence the author's self-directedness and motivation to accomplish this goal?

Rationale and Significance of the Study

Research on self-directed or self-regulated learning continues to be important when studying the adult learner. While many researchers have studied self-directed learning in formal education, Tough (1979) and Roberson and Merriam (2005) demonstrated the desire of many adults to direct their own learning projects toward achieving set goals. Personal projects have been researched from a psychological perspective (Christiansen, Little, & Backman, 1998; McGregor, & Little, 1998). However, while some of these projects have involved a greater time commitment, the research has not specifically looked at projects as involved as writing a novel.

Many people dream of writing, but they are hindered by fear and uncertainty about their own abilities (Keyes, 1995). Understanding how the participants in this study accomplished their goal of writing and publishing their first novel can certainly help other aspiring and floundering writers. According to the website Publishing Perspectives, this population is sizeable, with most American adults entertaining some notion that they have a book inside of

them (Goldberg, J. T., 2011). The findings in this study could also provide insights for the adult education facilitators who work with aspiring novelists at conferences, workshops, and in continuing education programs. While this study was specific to adults who had a dream of writing and publishing a novel, the findings of this research may also guide future studies on the experiences of others who have achieved major life goals, such as opening a business, becoming a professional musician or artist, or addressing a social or environmental problem close to the person's heart.

Researcher Relationship

"The construction of any work always bears the mark of the person who created it" (Riessman, 1993, p. v). Van Manen (1990) asserted that an important component to the phenomenological research method was for the researcher to choose a phenomenon of intense interest. Because the researcher needs to spend so much time looking anew at the phenomenon, it will require an intense interest for the researcher to remain open during the entire study—not just through the collection of data, but also through the iterative nature of analyzing and writing for understanding.

I have had the lifelong dream of becoming a published novelist. I often say that I wanted to become a writer even before I could read, though I do not remember the exact moment the dream first emerged. While being a writer has not been my only dream, it has been the most consistent one. Although I have completed a few manuscripts for novels, I have yet to publish any of them. I have attended several writers' conferences, taken several writing courses, and purchased dozens and dozens of books on writing novels. But, I still do not write on a consistent basis and will likely remain unpublished as a novelist until I find the motivation and willpower to sit down daily to write manuscripts.

In light of this, I certainly felt very personally motivated to write this dissertation. I wanted to find out for myself what it was about these published novelists that was different from me (so far). However, the more I studied the issues of motivation and goal setting, the more interested I became in the research itself—not just for personal reasons, but because I believe that more research is needed on how adults go about achieving personally meaningful goals.

Since I was personally involved with this research, bracketing my experiences and beliefs was extremely important, even before beginning the research. Tufford and Newman (2012) explained that bracketing has different definitions from becoming aware of one's beliefs and values to the hypotheses or presuppositions the researcher brings to the study.

> Bracketing is not simply a one-time occurrence of setting preconceptions in abeyance, but a process of self-discovery . . . Bracketing has the potential to greatly enrich data collections, research findings and interpretation—to the extent the researcher as instrument, maintains self-awareness as part of an ongoing process. (pp. 84–85)

Tufford and Newman (2012) suggested that the researcher begin the process of bracketing by memoing or reflexive journaling at the very beginning of the project. These initial preconceptions "also should be monitored throughout the research endeavor as both a potential source of insight as well as potential obstacles to engagement" (p. 85). The choice of how to bracket depends on the researcher and the topic. As Tufford and Newman (2012) explained "qualitative researchers need to consider what type of bracketing is an appropriate method for themselves and for the research area they wish to investigate" (p. 87).

Prior to beginning the interviews, I spent some time journaling my thoughts about writing in an attempt to recognize my own assumptions and to release them. Listening to the stories of the novelists was a joy for me and it opened my eyes to the variety of experiences and purposes

people have when they start writing a novel manuscript. I felt at once connected yet still separate from the participants, because this shared interest in writing manifests itself so differently in each of us. Bracketing helped me to set aside my preconceptions as I actively listened to the stories, which sometimes surprised me as the participants had such varied experiences, some of which I would never have imagined. I started off hoping to find some practical answers for myself and any other aspiring writer who had ever wondered what secrets to motivation would help them to succeed in their aspirations. I did not find these answers. Instead, I was exposed to new ways of thinking about the purpose and meaning of writing beyond the traditional hope of 'making it big.' I discovered the power of measuring success on one's own terms, of pursuing a dream that is difficult and enjoyable, rewarding and yet still filled with some disappointments and frustrations, but nevertheless a dream that made life more meaningful to the authors who continued to pursue this dream.

Definition of Terms

Self-directed learning and self-regulated learning**.** These terms refer to two similar theories, the first from adult education and the second from psychology, that deal with the processes and characteristics of an adult taking responsibility for his or her own learning (Pilling-Cormick & Garrison, 2007).

Personal project*s*. These are projects chosen by the person for a variety of reasons and can be simple or more complex (Lawton, Moss, Winter, & Hoffman, 2002).

Middle and later adulthood**.** According to Levinson's Life Task Developmental Model, adults start settling down and creating a second life structure between the ages of 33 to 40 (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2012). Therefore, participants in this study were at least 33 before they published their first novel.

Summary

This phenomenological study utilized interviews from adults who first published a novel during middle or later adulthood in order to understand the meaning they placed on writing this first novel. In self-directed and self-regulated learning theories, the meaning a person places on an activity is pivotal to motivation and the accomplishment of the goal (Garrison, 1997). The process of writing a first novel often involves self-directed learning, as the person requires self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation in order to develop an idea into a complete novel ready for publication. As such, self-directed learning provided the framework for the literature review guiding this study. Moreover, self-regulated learning, meaning, motivation, and learning projects are important components for understanding the process of writing a novel for publication. The next chapter will be the literature review for this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this dissertation was to study the lived experiences of adults who published their first novel during middle or later adulthood through phenomenological methods. Van Manen (1990) urged phenomenological researchers to remember that their purpose should always be about their practice. In other words, for this research to contribute to adult education theory, some aspect of adult education theory must remain at the forefront of the entire study. In this study, the participants were asked questions related to their experiences of writing and publishing the first novel, the meaning they placed on these experiences, the learning that occurred, and motivation and barriers related to their experiences. Self-directed learning is the adult learning theory most central to this study along with the self-regulated learning theory from educational psychology. There are many sub-topics that will be explored in this literature review, including meaning, motivation, and personal projects. At their core, these are all components of the self-directed writer.

The Self-Directed Writer

Many people talk about writing a novel. Writing a novel requires hard work and strong motivation to overcome the fears that often befall writers (Keyes, 1995). Furthermore, there are many opportunities for self-directed learning when attempting to write a novel. These include developing the craft and researching details to make the setting, characters, and plot seem more authentic. Gouthro (2014a, 2014b) studied lifelong learning and citizenship in fiction writers sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Many of the authors in the study had at least modest financial success from their writing. Some had even become best-selling authors and were well known in their genres. Gouthro's research focused on

traditionally published authors and found that many of these authors sought out learning opportunities in order to improve their writing craft. Here, Gouthro (2014a), described some typical learning experiences of writers:

> Aspiring writers may spend hundreds of hours working on manuscripts, attending courses and conferences, networking on the internet, and reading books. Yet the amount of time and labour [sic] expended on learning the craft of writing is generally invisible to most people as writing is a somewhat solitary pursuit. (p. 179)

In studying the experiences of these authors, Gouthro (2014b) stated that "learning to be a writer is very much a self-directed learning project" (p. 370).

In adult education, the theory of self-directed learning can be attributed to Malcolm Knowles (1970/1980) and his theory of andragogy; Tough's (1979) work on adult learning projects; and Houle's (1961) work *The Inquiring Mind* (Brockett, 1994; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Originally, the focus of self-directed learning was self-management on the part of the learner. Later, it evolved to include self-monitoring and motivational components (Garrison, 1997).

At its heart, self-directed learning involves the agency of the learner. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012) reviewed Knowles's andragogical model to show several components that related to self-direction. Adults see themselves as being responsible for their learning and have a "psychological need to be self-directing" (Knowles et al., 2012, p. 64). Adults bring their vast experiences, for better or worse, into their learning. They become ready to learn when they see a need to learn in their lives. This orientation to learning centers on real-life situations to help them complete tasks or solve problems. While adults have some extrinsic motivation, they learn

mostly for intrinsic reasons, such as improving the quality of their life or achieving a personally meaningful goal (Knowles et al., 2012).

Many of the assumptions within the theory of andragogy have been debated or criticized for being applicable only to certain adults, such as white, middle class individuals. Moreover, many critics have pointed out that adults may bring self-directedness to certain learning projects, but not all of them (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Nevertheless, adults who successfully complete and publish a novel manuscript will need to display most of these characteristics in order to accomplish their goals.

Self-directed learning can be seen as a goal of the adult learner, a process, or a characteristic (Merriam et al., 2007). While self-directed learning theory was developed partly due to the realization that adults outside of formal education consciously and intentionally direct their own learning processes, many of the models developed have focused on the educator's role of helping learners become more self-directed (Garrison, 1997; Merriam et al., 2007; Pilling-Cormick & Garrison, 2007). Most writers engage in self-directed learning without a facilitator guiding them. Therefore, viewing self-directed learning as a process was most beneficial to this study, in attempting to understand how the writers followed an idea or a desire to write through to the completion and publication of a novel.

Roberson and Merriam (2005) studied older, rural adults who were involved in self-directed learning. They discovered that the process often started with a catalyst: an external person or event that inspired the person to begin the project. Even though the person may have started the project for external reasons, a genuine interest developed. The adult then assessed his or her resources and gave systematic attention to the project. In the process, the person's attention shifted from being more casual to giving the project priority. Adjustments were made

in the learning, and eventually a resolution was reached, but not always. Writers, too, may cite a catalyst that led them to begin a particular writing project, but if intrinsic interest did not take hold, it would have been difficult to remain motivated throughout such a large project. In order to complete the manuscript, the writer generally needs to give the project high priority and make adjustments throughout the process until a resolution (a completed manuscript and publication) is reached.

The Self-Regulated Writer

In adult education, the process is known as self-directed learning, emphasizing autonomy and management of the external components of learning (Garrison, 1997). In educational psychology, this process is known as self-regulated learning. They are very similar in meaning, but their focus and terminology are different. In self-regulated learning, the key processes are behavior (i.e., the use of learning strategies), cognition or metacognition (i.e., a learner's awareness of what is already known and decisions about what strategies to use), and motivation and affect (Pintrich, 1995; Zimmerman, 1990). Zimmerman (1990) described the close relationship between motivation and learning for self-regulated learners. "Learning and motivation are treated as interdependent processes that cannot be fully understood apart from each other" (p. 6). Weinstein, Acee, and Jung (2011) described this interdependence as similar to a gestalt in which "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and it is difficult to attribute causation to any particular component or element in a component" (p. 46).

Zimmerman (2001) asserted that a self-regulated learner must take personal initiative, have determination and perseverance to complete the project, and have the ability to adapt throughout the process of achieving the learning goal. A crucial component to the successful self-regulated learning is a feedback loop. Zimmerman (1990, 2001) viewed this loop as

cyclical, allowing the learner to monitor the progress made toward a goal and to react to it, in part by making changes in behaviors to better achieve that goal. Nodoushan (2012) continued the work of Zimmerman by suggesting that the feedback loop is a spiral, because "motivation is the drive behind starting the process. . . [and with each step] it gathers momentum" (p. 4).

Self-Regulation and Social Cognitive Theory

In social cognitive theory, the interaction between humans and their physical and social environment has a great influence on the choices that humans make. One does not dominate the other. In his work on social cognitive theory, Bandura (2006) repudiated "a duality between human agency and social structures. People create social systems, and these systems, in turn, organize and influence people's lives" (p. 164). Agency is central to this theory as humans attempt to gain some sense of control over their lives in response to the environment they live in. Bandura (2001, 2006) described functional agency as a combination of individual, proxy, and collective modes. Furthermore, agency has four properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. A person expressing agentic behavior intends or chooses his or her actions, instead of merely reacting to circumstances. Forethought involves not only thinking about future goals, but also directing present day behavior toward achieving those goals. Self-reactiveness involves self-regulating one's behavior "to construct appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution" (Bandura, 2006, p. 165). Through self-reflection, people examine the choices they have made and "reflect on their personal efficacy, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, and the meaning of their pursuits, and they make corrective adjustments if necessary" (p. 165).

Social cognitive theorists view self-regulated learning as a process in which a learner engages in certain, specific situations (Schunk, 2001). A learner is not always self-regulated.

For instance, people who feel that they have no talent for writing will not be motivated to write a novel, so self-regulation will not be necessary. When a person perceives a talent for writing and has a desire to tell a particular story, then the writer will be more likely to engage in the process of self-regulation.

Schunk (2001) identified self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction as components of the social cognitive perspective of self-regulation. Self-observation occurs when a person observes his or her own behaviors that lead to progress toward or impede achievement of a goal. Perhaps after observing the behavior of watching three hours of television after work each night, an aspiring writer will decide to spend one hour away from the television and instead begin writing an outline for the novel. When the writer starts noticing that by spending one hour an evening for five days, he or she now has twenty pages of notes, this may further motivate the writer to dedicate even more time to writing

Self-judgment occurs when the writer compares "present performance with one's goal" (Schunk, 2001, p. 131). If the writer has set a goal of writing an entire novel in a year and knows that he or she needs at least two drafts of 200 to 300 pages each, then the writer may decide to start dedicating four hours on Saturday and Sunday to the process of writing. As the writer completes more pages and feels good about these accomplishments, the writer feels more self-efficacious and motivated to continue. Schunk (2001) noted that goals should be specific, proximal, and challenging. In this case, the goal of writing a novel could be divided into smaller tasks, so that small subgoals can be achieved early on. Perhaps the writer will focus on completing a rough draft of Chapter 1 in two weeks' time to avoid feeling overwhelmed by the large goal of writing an entire novel.

Self-reaction involves how the learner feels about the accomplishments. Positive feelings may lead to a desire to continue striving for the goal. Negative feelings about one's accomplishments can also prove helpful, provided the person thinks that he or she can improve (Schunk, 1990).

Comprehensive Model

Garrison (1997) and Pilling-Cormick and Garrison (2007) noted the similarities between adult education's self-directed learning theory and psychology's self-regulated learning. They believed that a more comprehensive model would bring the two together.

In his work on developing a comprehensive model, Garrison (1997) identified three integrated areas of self-directed learning: self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation. He asserted that early theorists focused on self-management, and the other two areas emerged later. Garrison (1997) looked to self-regulation theory, with its emphasis on cognitive (self-monitoring) and motivational components, to develop a richer model of self-directed learning.

Gouthro (2014a, 2014b) described many of the activities published writers frequently chose in their quest to develop themselves as writers. These self-management skills included reading novels, joining writing classes or critique groups, and attending conferences. Some joined writing networks and participated in workshops in order to learn about emerging issues in publication, especially in light of new technologies. Choosing which methods work best for the individual is another part of self-management. Gouthro (2014b) found that some authors preferred to learn through solitary activities as they acquired the skills to become better writers, whereas others felt energized and supported within writing communities, such as writing classes or critique groups.

The writer must self-monitor his or her cognitive response to writing the novel. Central to self-monitoring is "taking responsibility for the construction of personal meaning (i.e., integrating new ideas and concepts with previous knowledge). Responsibility for self-monitoring reflects a commitment and obligation to construct meaning through critical reflection and collaborative confirmation" (Garrison, 1997, p. 24). When faced with new skills and knowledge, the self-directed learner will take the time to understand what this newly integrated knowledge means and how to use it.

Another important aspect of self-monitoring is internal and external feedback (Garrison, 1997). The writing critique group provides a place for writers to bridge together this internal and external feedback. Not only in presenting their work for others to critique, but also in practicing critiquing others' work, they often develop skills to recognize quality both in others' writing and in their own (Gouthro, Holloway, & Careless, 2012). Garrison (1997) referred to this as "integrating this external feedback with his or her own internal meaning assessment" (p. 25).

Finally, motivation is necessary for successfully completing a novel and getting it published. Motivation comes from finding meaning and value in the activity and believing in one's ability to achieve success (Garrison, 1997). Gouthro (2014a) found that "the decision to become a writer is often closely connected to an individual's goals about engaging in work that is intensely meaningful" (p. 174). Completing and publishing novels requires strong motivation because there are often external barriers to success, such as finances and rejections, as well as internal barriers, such as "a nagging sense of self-doubt" (Gouthro, 2014b, p. 365). Gouthro's (2014b) study focused on female authors who "demonstrated that a love or passion for writing can be a powerful motivator" (p. 371).

These three components—self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation—are crucial to developing as a self-directed learner. Garrison (1997) wrote, "Authentic self-directed learning becomes self-reinforcing and intrinsically motivating" (p. 29). Gouthro (2014a, 2014b) found that the authors in her study were quite self-directed in their pursuit of becoming better writers.

The following sections provide an overview of some important components of self-directed and self-regulated learning.

Meaning

Frankl (1959/2006) recognized a difference between the purpose or meaning *of* life and a person's meaning *in* life. He argued that "man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life . . . This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone" (p. 99). Frankl understood different ways of finding meaning in life, but the one relevant to this paper is one's *vocation* or *mission* in life. Everyone has an individual mission in life, which cannot be replicated by another. Gouthro's (2014a) study of published authors found:

> For most authors, it often takes years of work before they are published. When considering why an individual would exert that much effort into an activity for which there is no guarantee that there will be any economic return or even a sense of personal accomplishment in seeing one's book come out in print. . . it may veer into a vocation. (p. 184)

Vocation can be understood as *purpose*, which Bronk (2011) defined as "an enduring, personally meaningful commitment to what one hopes to accomplish or work toward in life" (p. 32). Purpose and *identity* are separate but interrelated. One reinforces the other. While Bronk

maintained that there was a distinction between purpose and identity, Vallerand (2012) cited his own earlier work on passion, which brings the two constructs more closely together:

> Vallerand et al., (2003), defined passion as a strong inclination toward a self-defining activity (or object) that one likes (or even loves), finds important and meaningful, and in which one invests time and energy. . . . It is essential that this activity be meaningful for the person and part of one's identity to be a passion. (p. 47)

Gouthro (2014a) found that this sense of passion and identity guided writers through long hours in order for them to write and revise their manuscripts and to develop as writers.

Motivation

When developing social cognitive theory, Bandura (1982, 1989) made many important findings on self-efficacy that are important to self-regulation learning theory (Zimmerman, 1990). A person experiences self-efficacy when he or she believes that he or she has the ability to complete the task at hand. Therefore, a person is not always self-efficacious, as it depends on the context. Bandura (1989) asserted, "People's self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort they will exert in an endeavor and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles" (p. 1176). Bandura (1989) found that resiliency is key to success. When there is a long road to completing a project, there are many opportunities to falter and doubt in one's ability to succeed, especially when setbacks arise. While many people stop at this point and give up, Bandura (1989) noted that some people are able to overcome self-doubt and move on to successfully complete their project.

However, Bandura (1982) found that high self-efficacy does not always lead to positive outcomes. A feeling of high self-efficacy may lead to the feeling that one does not need to put effort into the task, resulting in poorer learning behaviors. On the other hand, Bandura (1982)

asserted “when applying existing skills strong efficaciousness intensifies and sustains the effort needed for optimal performance, which is difficult to realize if one is beleaguered by self-doubts” (p. 123). Having strong self-efficacy in the ability to learn might encourage a person to put forth more effort toward improving skills (Bandura, 1982). Furthermore, a study on college students in a writing course found that strong belief in self-efficacy led the students to raise their own goals “and the quality of writing with which they would be self-satisfied” (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

Bandura (1989) also stated that self-efficacy beliefs guide the choices people make in activities, which, in turn, affect personal development. These choices can be self-limiting or open the person up to new possibilities and Bandura (1989) noted:

> Any factor that influences choice behavior can profoundly affect the direction of personal development because the social influences operating in the environments that are selected continue to promote certain competencies, values, and interests long after the decisional determinant has rendered its inaugurating effect. (p. 1178).

In addition, perceived strong self-efficacy need not be completely true to be helpful to the person as long as the beliefs “are not unduly disparate from what is possible” (Bandura, 1989, p. 1177). This optimistic view could lead a person to take risks that may lead to great successes. Without this error in self-appraisal, people “would rarely fail but they would not mount the extra effort needed to surpass their ordinary performances” (p. 1177).

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008) is a motivation theory that focuses on autonomy in choosing the goal. Deci and Ryan (2008) defined autonomy as intrinsic motivation and successfully internalized extrinsic motivation. This integration of intrinsic and internalized extrinsic motivation is critical to pursuing goals in an interactive environment in which the

person must balance personal desires with external expectations. It almost goes without saying, but interest is an important component of motivation. In their study on passionate interests and well-being, Dik and Hansen (2008) asserted "emotional interest also is, theoretically, part of the mechanism through which vocational interests and leisure interests develop. Dispositional interests in work and leisure have been conceptualized as playing critical roles in providing direction for activities pursued within these life domains" (p. 95).

Vallerand (2012) described a need for various types of motivation for completing activities in life:

> Motivational processes matter greatly with respect to living a meaningful life. . . . Both passion and motivation are important. Motivation may matter more for nonpassionate activities that we still need to perform in our lives . . . while passion may be especially important for the relatively few activities that makes us thrive in our lives. (p. 49)

Many goals might require a combination of activities one enjoys passionately and those one does not enjoy. Passion may sustain the person and help him or her to find the motivation to perform more onerous tasks in order to reach the goals he or she values.

As Dweck (2006) discussed, if people have a fixed mindset, they will be afraid to try to accomplish their life goals. They would rather bask in their natural talent, fantasizing about future success, rather than risk failure by taking the necessary steps now. They dream of that great "someday" when all their dreams will come true, rather than building their signature strengths through practice today. With a growth mindset, a person with a dream will not put off beginning the arduous but exciting journey of building strengths and facing challenges, bringing the dream closer to reality with each small step taken toward that goal.

Personal Projects

An important component for the self-directed learner, especially when studying the self-directedness of the writer, is the personal learning project. Tough (1979) shared a study of personal learning projects that helped lead to the development of self-directed learning theory in adult education. Drawing on Tough's work, Hiemstra (1976) identified the following characteristics of adults: (a) most adults have developed their own learning projects; (b) almost all learning takes place outside of formal education, is directed by the adult, and often takes place in the home; and (c) the adult learner chooses projects that are "practically oriented or of a self-fulfillment nature" (p. 94). Adult learners turn to printed materials and people they already know in order to gather the information they need. Hiemstra's (1976) article was written prior to the proliferation of home computers and the Internet. Now, these resources would be included as an important source of learning.

In the field of educational psychology, McGregor and Little (1998) studied the motivation of people involved with personal projects that they chose independently. McGregor and Little (1998) found that "participants whose personal projects were consistent with core elements of their self-identity reported higher levels of meaning than did those whose projects were less reflective of self-identity" (p. 505).

Frequent advice given to prospective writers is to avoid following a fad, believing that this will lead to a commercially successful novel. Fads cannot be predicted, and the writing will lack depth if the writer has no passion for the topic. Yolen (2006) directed writers to choose topics that interest them and to write for themselves, not for some audience out there. Of her own writing, Yolen (2006) stated, "I write the book I want to read, the one I cannot find anywhere else. I write a book to find out what happens, just as I read a book to find out what

happens" (p. 69). Yolen stated that an author has a better chance of reaching other readers after pleasing the reader within.

Lawton, Moss, Winter, and Hoffman (2002) wrote that "values give meaning to the motivational processes" (p. 539). Therefore, when writers choose projects that they value, they may find that meaning helps keep them motivated. In studying the personal projects of older adults, Lawton et al. found that "more complex projects require greater resources because indulging them carries greater psychological and physical challenge; in turn, the benefits of enhancing positive well-being are correspondingly greater if projects are successfully pursued" (p. 546). Writing a novel would qualify as a complex project that would likely require great amounts of time, determination, and intellectual and emotional resources (Gouthro 2014a, 2014b). When writing a manuscript, many writers reach a point when they begin to doubt the worthiness of their novel and consider giving up (e.g., Keyes, 1995). Published writers have found a way to override their doubts and continue until they have something written and published—at which time they can enjoy their success. Gouthro (2014b) found that, even though self-doubt sometimes challenged the authors, the desire to write motivated them to continue. "The enormous amount of time, energy, and dedication that [the authors] committed to developing their craft is an indicator of the desire that people have to do work that is intrinsically valuable" (p. 371).

Summary

This study explored the lived experiences of writers who published their first novels in middle or later life and the meaning they gave to those novels, using the phenomenological method based on van Manen (1990). Van Manen insisted that the educational researcher should not lose sight of the main purpose of the research: education. For this reason, self-directed

learning and self-regulated learning were highlighted in this chapter. Sub-topics included meaning, motivation, and personal learning projects. These topics were explored in order to better understand the meaning the participants in this study gave to the process of writing and publishing their first novel. The phenomenological methodology utilized for this study will be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Many people have ideas that they believe would make a great novel. They often talk as though having a great idea for a novel is something spectacular and unusual, as though the act of having the idea is the difficult part of writing the novel. Those who complete their manuscripts, however, know that the idea is only the beginning. Without the hard work of writing, the idea is "nothing particularly special" (Sellers, 2007, p. 3). The decision to write a novel can be daunting, with so many empty pages looming (Keyes, 1995). Many begin, only to procrastinate, falter, and quit along the way (Banes, 2012; Keyes, 1995).

The research on self-directed learning, goal-setting, and motivation has examined people achieving or not achieving various objectives and goals. However, little research has been conducted regarding larger, personally meaningful and self-directed goals, such as the writing and publication of an entire novel. This study explored how adults in middle or later adulthood found the motivation to take their ideas all the way to the publication of a novel manuscript, the meaning this process had for them, and the learning they did along the way to achieving their goal.

The methodology of this research was phenomenological, specifically the practice-based hermeneutic phenomenology developed by the pedagogist van Manen (1990)—here adapted for the adult educator. Since this methodology emphasizes staying focused on the purpose of the practitioner (in this case, adult education), this study explored the meaning novelists placed on writing and publishing their first novel and the role motivation and learning had in this process.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research often seeks to tell the story of a lived experience, incorporating the feelings, passion, and thoughts of people not easily reduced to numbers (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2002). While quantitative research allows theories to be tested, when a phenomenon has not been studied sufficiently, qualitative researchers can develop theories through inductive reasoning (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Qualitative researchers "emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14). Although much diversity exists within qualitative research, Merriam (2002) explained that the fundamental principle is that people construct meaning based on their experiences with their environment. Qualitative researchers study the meanings of these experiences and not things that are objective and quantifiable.

As they seek to explain processes and experiences of people, qualitative researchers have a wide variety of options. These depend on their goals, the research questions for the study, the conceptual framework with which they are interpreting the data, the methods they are employing to collect that data, and their choices for validation (Maxwell, 2005). Crotty (1998) divided the questions researchers need to ask themselves about their study into the categories of methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology. Methods are the tools the researcher will use while the methodology is the strategy for conducting the study, which determines the methods utilized. The theoretical perspective pertains to "the philosophical stance informing the methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3), and the epistemology is "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Hence these are all interrelated. Only once these are answered can a researcher determine the design of the study.

Before conducting qualitative research, one should understand several important characteristics of this type of research. First, the researcher wants to learn how participants construct meaning. To do so, second, the researcher becomes the primary research instrument. Merriam (2002) asserted "since understanding is the goal of this research, the human instrument, which is able to be immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data" (p. 5). Suppose a researcher wants to learn about motivation in adults as they seek to achieve their lifelong dreams. He or she could use a survey as the primary tool of data collection, but there may be qualities to the participants' dreams that the researcher could not foresee. With the survey, the researcher would miss out on these complexities and take the research in an entirely different direction. With the researcher as the instrument, it becomes easier to adapt to participants' responses.

The third characteristic of qualitative research involves how theories are developed. Merriam (2002) concluded that qualitative researchers build theory from data inductively. Creswell (2014) found that qualitative researchers use both inductive and deductive approaches. They begin inductively as they discover themes and patterns from the data. "Then deductively, the researchers look back at their data from the themes to determine if more evidence can support each theme or whether they need to gather additional information" (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). At any rate, as a result of the first three characteristics, Merriam (2002) added the fourth common characteristic that qualitative research results in thick, rich descriptions in order to adequately explain the findings.

Qualitative research is best used when significance cannot be easily reduced to a number, such as describing and understanding the messy, emotional, value-laden, intuitive nature of human interaction and the meanings people create based on their personalities, experiences, and

cultures. Creswell (2007) explained that the researcher should use qualitative methods to explore intricate problems or contextualize them and to allow participants to share their experiences in their own voices. In addition, Creswell (2007) found that qualitative research is useful for developing theories, exploring inadequate ones, and focusing on the unique, not the numerical, representation. The strength of qualitative research is the ability to explore phenomena and human interactions in order to better understand the complexity of how people feel, think, and interact with their world.

The weaknesses of qualitative research are also found in its strengths. The use of the researcher as the primary instrument may allow for flexibility and adaptability in the field, but it also presents a potential downfall. The researcher needs to understand his or her assumptions before beginning the study, because those assumptions will affect the way the research is conducted and the data is interpreted. Understanding one's assumptions helps to limit the ill effects of researcher bias (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). However, this requires the ability to critically self-reflect. Member-checks and peer examination can help keep the researcher on track in this regard (Creswell, 2007). Another strength of qualitative research—the ability to contextualize—can also lead to one of its main problems; unlike many quantitative designs, strong generalizations cannot be made. Generalizations should be made cautiously, always remembering the context of the particular participants and the original setting when considering how the results might relate to other groups and settings. Merriam and Simpson (2000) asserted that the reader, not the writer, should determine if a study done in one context has any applicability to another situation.

Phenomenological Research

Phenomenology has deep philosophical roots and was developed as a return to the search for wisdom, rejecting the demand for everything to be reduced to numbers and objective proof (Creswell, 2007). Various philosophers and researchers have developed phenomenology into a research methodology. At its core, this methodology is about discovering the lived experiences, real or imagined, of people as they interact with the world; it strives to find the universal essence of a phenomenon by studying the experiences of several persons and finding what these varied experiences have in common (Creswell, 2007). In describing phenomenology, Merriam (2002) stated "the person and his or her world are interrelated and interdependent. The researcher's focus is thus on neither the human subject nor the human world but on the essence of the meaning of this interaction" (p. 93).

Although the goal is to describe the experience as closely as possible, the very act of contemplating an experience changes it, and so phenomenology can only be done retrospectively, after the experience (van Manen, 1990). Even though the researcher seeks to find the essence of the experienced phenomenon, van Manen (1990) asserted that, unlike other research that is generalizable, "phenomenology is, in a broad sense, a philosophy or *theory of the unique;* it is interested in what is essentially not replaceable" (p. 6).

Following Husserl, the father of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), various orientations of this philosophical methodology have fostered a deepened understanding of how to study the phenomenon or lived experience. These various threads of phenomenology differ in their approach used to reach this understanding. As such, it is important to begin the research with an exploration of the various approaches in order to get a sense of the one most appropriate for the research at hand. Phenomenology Online, a resource for understanding phenomenology, has

identified six variations, starting with the one developed by Husserl and ending with a more practitioner-based orientation (van Manen, 2011). In order to help nursing researchers who may not have a strong background in philosophy to understand the basis of phenomenology, Converse (2012) explained that Husserl focused on epistemology and the essence of the phenomenon, while Heidegger developed Husserl's work to focus on the ontological question of what being really means. Gadamer then drew on Heidegger's work to explore the context of the writer in the interpretation of the text, which generated the third major orientation of phenomenology: hermeneutic phenomenology. Experiential or practitioner-based phenomenology takes ideas from these philosophers to develop a methodology that is more focused on application than on these fine distinctions of philosophy (van Manen, 2011).

This research focused on the experiences of novelists in order to further the understanding of the motivation and learning of adults who accomplished a personally meaningful goal. In this context, the distinctions between essence and the meaning of being were not nearly as important as understanding how these authors' motivation and self-directedness in accomplishing their goals fits into the larger body of adult education theory and practice. For this reason, this study followed a more practical-based form of hermeneutic phenomenology informed by the pedagogist, van Manen (1990). Van Manen (1990) discussed the importance of orienting one's research toward one's practice; for this reason, the orientation of this study was adult education theory, specifically how adults achieve self-directed goals for personally meaningful projects.

Van Manen (1990) wrote a book to help the practitioner, particularly the pedagogist, to understand how to apply hermeneutic phenomenology to educational research. He adamantly denied that this was a procedural manual and insisted that ultimately the researcher must make

his or her own decisions based on the context. Nevertheless, he offered guidelines that proved to be beneficial for the development of this study.

Van Manen (1990) identified several important elements for the researcher to keep in mind. Central to the study is the phenomenon—the lived experience—under investigation. Through consciousness this phenomenon is experienced and through retrospection its meaning is explored. Its essence is uncovered by systematically studying the particulars in order to discover what is universal. The meaning of the lived experience should be described richly and deeply in such a way that the reader has a sense of experiencing the phenomenon. While phenomenology is scientific in its systematic and self-critical study, the focus is on the experience rather than objective reality. The aim is "a search for what it means to be human" (van Manen, 1990, p. 12). Finally, because the essence of a phenomenon is experienced pre-verbally, writing the research may resemble poetry with an emphasis on metaphor and silence. Understanding these foundational elements can help the researcher to "do" hermeneutic phenomenology, trying to "construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal" (van Manen, 1990, p. 18).

From this philosophical foundation, van Manen (1990) suggested six phases to guide the methodology. The researcher should begin with a topic of intense interest. The researcher strives to find how that phenomenon is lived experientially, not conceptually. From this exploration, essential themes are identified. Van Manen (1990) asserted that the exploration of the language of the lived experience through writing and rewriting is intimately tied to the research process of phenomenology; it is not just the means to present the research. It is through this reflective writing that the researcher more fully develops an understanding of the

phenomenon. Crucially, the researcher should always keep in mind his or her orientation. Within the study of the phenomenon, the researcher must balance between the parts and the whole in order to understand the context of the lived experience. These phases should not be considered linear; rather, the researcher moves between them and sometimes focuses on several phases simultaneously. This methodology should be a guide to the researcher, not something to follow mechanically.

Research Questions

Phenomenology offers insights, not theories, and its questions should focus on the meaning of experiences (van Manen, 1990). In light of these principles, this study focused on these research questions:

1. What meaning does the author place on the experience of writing and publishing the first novel?
2. How did this meaning influence the author's self-directedness and motivation to accomplish this goal?

Participant Selection

The target population for this study consisted of people who published their first novel during middle or later adulthood. For the sample, both traditionally published and self-published novelists were accepted. The participants were at least 33 years old at the time of the publication of their first novel. According to Levinson's Life Task Developmental Model, adults between the ages of 33 and 40 begin settling down and creating a second life structure (Knowles et al., 2012). Creating that second life structure requires time, money, and energy. Feeling a lack of these is cited as a common barrier in adult learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Lack of time is also frequently used as an excuse by many who claim that they want to write a book. Cameron

(1998) argued that writing is an everyday activity that does not require large blocks of time to begin. Cameron (1998) argued that "the myth that we must have 'time'—more time—in order to create is a myth that keeps us from using the time we do have" (Cameron, 1998, p. 13). The participants in this study made time to write instead of hiding behind these excuses.

Maxwell (2005) explained that purposeful selection of participants occurs most frequently in qualitative research. The researcher chooses "particular settings, persons, or activities" (p. 88) to find the information needed. For this study, I identified two groups where I was likely to find potential participants: the Midwest Writer's Workshop and Nanowrimo (National Novel Writing Month). I had attended the Midwest Writer's Workshop several times and already had contacts through my prior attendance there. Additionally, I signed up to participate in a local section of Nanowrimo (Novel Writing in a Month) and had access to other members through an online forum. Once the Institutional Review Board granted approval, I sent emails to contacts at these sites, describing the study and the participation criteria. After agreeing to participate, they were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C) and given a link to fill out an online questionnaire (Appendix A) on Qualtrics, which served to verify that criteria were met.

The Midwest Writers' Workshop in Muncie, Indiana provided numerous contacts directly with writers themselves, and a pair of editors attending the conference relayed the information to writers they believed qualified for the study. Of the original nine contacts from the workshop, only five writers chose to participate. From the online forum of the local Nanowrimo group, only one participant was recruited. I contacted several professors from Ball State University and asked them to distribute the information to their writing contacts; no participants were found this way.

The original proposal listed eight to twelve participants. Creswell (2007) cited Polkinghorne in recommending 5–25 participants when conducting a phenomenological study. Englander (2012) explained that a phenomenological study should include at least three participants. However, he explained that more participants would allow the researcher to have "better appreciation for variation of the phenomenon" (p. 21). By May 2014, there were only six, and one of these participants was waiting until she finished a writing project before she would commit. I presented some preliminary findings from the study in May 2014 at an academic conference. At the conference, one novelist offered to participate and another offered to contact a colleague who met the criteria. This colleague agreed to participate and had a friend who also met the criteria. This brought the total to nine. Later in the summer, a few of the participants volunteered to contact colleagues, but I declined, realizing the need to end the data collection process.

Data Collection

In this study, the primary data collection consisted of interviews. Although these participants—published novelists—would have had no problem writing journals or essays to explore the topic, van Manen (1990) suggested that the written word leads one to reflect on, rather than to describe the actual experience. While phenomenology seeks to find meaning, it does so by attempting to describe the phenomenon as experientially as possible. Both van Manen (1990) and Merriam (2002) recommended the interview for uncovering the essence of the phenomenon.

Merriam and Simpson (2000) explained that one of the advantages of interviews over surveys is that they allow the interviewer to request clarification and further explanation from the participants. A continuum exists between a structured (all questions pre-determined) and

unstructured interview that "only guides the researcher through areas for investigation" (p. 152). Merriam and Simpson (2000) recommended structured interviews for large numbers of people and unstructured interviews when "explor[ing] all possibilities regarding the information sought . . . [because the unstructured interview] helps identify and define important areas of information that might be studied through other techniques at another time" (p. 152). This study consisted of nine participants—a small number—but the less focused exploration of the unstructured interview would not have been helpful for a dissertation. Therefore, the semi-structured interview provided both guidance and flexibility for this study.

Potential participants received an email describing the study, along with the consent form (Appendix C) and a link to the preliminary questionnaire (Appendix A). The preliminary questionnaire was used to ascertain the participant's age at the writing and publishing of the first novel, as well as his or her prior background in writing. I brought hard copies of the consent forms to the face-to-face interviews and asked participants to sign the forms before commencing the interviews. Three of the participants agreed to phone interviews due to distance or scheduling conflicts. Those participants either scanned their signed consent form or sent it to me by post.

I conducted two interviews for each participant. In the first, I gathered most of the information about the participants' experiences. In the second, I asked further questions to clarify and explore based on information from the first interview and I presented potential themes to the participants about their experiences. The first interview was a semi-structured interview (Appendix B) with questions designed to answer the research questions, but with built-in flexibility, so that the participants could tell their stories more fully—even in ways that sometimes came as a surprise to me. Because this was a phenomenological study, the questions

directed the participants to consider their experiences and the meaning they found in writing and publishing their first novel. Two non-published writers reviewed the interview guide in order to ensure that the questions made sense. They were asked to offer suggestions for anything they felt was missing. Those suggestions that fit with the nature of the study were accepted and incorporated into the interview guide.

Opdenakker (2006) noted that face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to observe the body language and tone of the speaker. These cues can help the researcher to decipher the attitudes and emotions of the participant. At the same time, the interviewer may unconsciously give social cues that can change the direction and tone of the interview. Opdenakker (2006) warned that, when using a tape recorder to ensure accuracy, the interviewer should still take notes to make sure all questions have been answered. Written notes also ensure that the researcher has a record of the interview in case the recorder does not work or the interviewer forgets to hit the record button. For this study, the interviews were audio recorded. In addition, I wrote some notes during the interviews and made field notes afterwards to reflect on the interviews. The first interview with each participant lasted between one and two hours.

I had originally intended to conduct all of the semi-structured interviews with the participants and then do some initial analysis of the interviews in order to formulate potential themes. The second interview would then consist of questions designed to clarify or further explore the participants' experiences with that first published novel; together, we would review the potential themes in order to have a hermeneutic conversation in which "both the interviewer and the interviewee attempt to interpret the significance of the preliminary themes in light of the original phenomenological question" (van Manen, 1990, p. 99). As often happens in the research process, especially in dissertation research, plans require modification and flexibility (Bolker,

1998). Interviews occurred in phases throughout the spring and summer. First and second interviews were conducted with a pair of participants and then transcribed during the early spring of 2014. Then, I conducted first interviews with four more participants and began the transcriptions as I prepared for a conference presentation of the early findings of the research. At that point, I did not have the number of participants desired. Upon return from the conference, I began a series of second interviews and conducted a first interview with a participant I had met at the conference. First interviews were then arranged with two more participants I had obtained through another contact at the conference. As a result, the data collection process contained more phases than initially anticipated. Because all of the first interviews had not been conducted before the second interviews began, I was hesitant to search for global themes. I will explain this process with the multiple phases of data collection and analysis later in this chapter. Instead of developing universal themes for the second interview, I looked closely at each individual's first interview, thinking only of that one person's experience when developing a list of themes. The second interview then consisted more of a clarification of the experiences of the participant. These interviews generally lasted thirty minutes to one hour. One participant spoke for two hours at both interviews.

I took a few notes during the interviews, but since I wanted to stay focused on the interview, I did not take many. Following the interviews, I recorded my feelings and thoughts about the interviews and continued to take notes throughout the transcriptions of interviews, analysis of data, and while reading books on phenomenology.

Data collection began during the spring of 2014 and continued throughout the summer.

Confidentiality of Data

The confidentiality of the participants was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the concealment of other identifying information when the research was presented at conferences and for this dissertation. All documents were kept on a password-protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. I conducted the interviews and transcribed them, and only my faculty advisor and I had access to the raw data. Any findings reported in published manuscripts or presentations will utilize the pseudonyms and non-identifying information.

Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2014) explained that in qualitative research, in general, validity refers to the "accuracy of findings" (p. 201). One thing to keep in mind, however, is that phenomenology deals with the meaning of lived experiences and not an objective factual account. In reading a well-written and researched description of a lived experience, the reader will recognize the validity of the research (van Manen, 1990). Reliability has to do with consistency in the methods used to conduct the research. Kirk and Miller (1986) wrote succinctly that, "reliability depends essentially on explicitly described observational procedures" (p. 41). The record of methods is thus provided in this chapter, including both what I intended and what I actually did during the course of the research study.

Vagle (2014) explained that a phenomenological researcher can enhance validity through the "sustained engagement with the phenomenon and the participants who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 66). I conducted this study for nearly a year and attempted to interact openly with the phenomenon and the data. Vagle (2014) described such openness as crucial to the sustained engagement that serves to strengthen the validity of the research. This process

includes bracketing. Merriam (2002) asserted that "Bracketing, or the process of *epoche*, allows the experience of the phenomenon to be explained in terms of its own intrinsic system of meaning, not one imposed on it from without" (p. 94). Prior to data collection and at various times throughout data analysis, I recorded in a journal my own experiences with creative fiction writing in an attempt to better understand my own assumptions about what I would find, to set those aside, and to return to the phenomenon with openness.

Additionally, the nine participants in the study provided varied perspectives on their experiences with the phenomenon. As mentioned before, two interviews were conducted with each participant in order to explore the participant's experience of writing and publishing a first novel. The first interview focused on an experiential, concrete description of the experience. The second interview included follow-up questions designed to clarify and deepen the understanding of the data collected from the first interview. Prior to this second interview, I transcribed the first interview and created a preliminary list of themes related to that participant's experience of the phenomenon. The second interview then allowed participants to agree or disagree with my interpretation or to clarify, deepen, and explore additional themes. This process served as a form of member-checking, which Creswell (2014) recommended as one method of validation.

Creswell (2014) listed other methods of validation for qualitative research, including producing a rich, thick description of the phenomenon and peer debriefing. The words participants used to describe their experiences of the phenomenon were essential for producing such thick, rich descriptions. Peer debriefing occurred on three levels throughout the various stages of the analysis: with fellow doctoral students, with my dissertation chair, and with newly acquainted peers, including established researchers and graduate students attending my

presentations at academic conferences. I sent excerpts of interview transcriptions (using the participants' pseudonyms) to fellow doctoral students for them to interpret the themes. Communication occurred primarily through electronic means. I also met with one peer who served as a sounding board for several discussions about the meaning and themes. During the analysis stage, I presented preliminary findings of various aspects of the research at three conferences. Because the presentations were roundtables, I was able to present these preliminary findings and then engage in discussion with various academic researchers for further peer debriefing.

To better ensure reliability, Creswell (2014) suggested that the researcher should describe the procedures for research collection and analysis, verify the accuracy of transcriptions, and cross-check codes with another person, if possible. I used memos to describe the procedures of the research; the transcriptions of the first interviews were analyzed in order to create questions for the second interviews; and themes were shared with the participants, giving them the opportunity to clarify and make corrections. As indicated in the validity section, sections of the transcriptions were shared with peers who gave fresh perspectives on the coding.

Data Analysis

For this study, I adopted the data analysis techniques suggested by van Manen (1990), who used hermeneutic phenomenology to study the meaning of pedagogy. He suggested beginning the study of a phenomenon by exploring one's own personal experiences with it in order to understand how others might experience it. Traditionally, in phenomenology, the researcher's exploration of his or her experience and assumptions of the phenomenon has been called bracketing or the Epoche. Moustakas (1994) explained that:

> I must practice Epoche alone, its nature and intensity require my absolute presence in absolute aloneness. . . . I return to the original nature of my conscious experience. I return to whatever is there in memory, perception, judgment, feeling, whatever is actually there. (p. 87)

Moustakas (1994) asserted that this process should take place many times, listing all one's preconceptions in writing until there is a sense of closure. Only then will the researcher be ready to begin the interviews, because, after this intense self-reflection, it will be more possible for the researcher to listen to what is being said, instead of interpreting it from unexamined assumptions.

Prior to any interviews taking place, this bracketing occurred through journaling over a period of several months as the idea of the study developed. During the interviews exploring the lived experiences and meanings others place on the phenomenon, I listened with openness by trying to practice "a certain attentiveness to the things of the world as we live them rather than as we conceptualize or theorize them" (van Manen, 2014, p. 372). In order to continuously return to this sense of openness, I wrote field notes after every interview and kept a journal of my thoughts and assumptions about the phenomenon. This reflection continued throughout the interviewing process and the analysis and writing stages. I also spoke with peers and advisors when exploring the findings in order to help me to clarify my own thoughts and maintain focus on the phenomenon itself.

Data analysis began with the first of the data collection as ideas were initially explored. Vagle (2014) stated, "In phenomenological research, like other qualitative research methodologies, it is difficult to separate data gathering from analysis, as the two are so delicately intertwined throughout all phases of a study" (p. 96). Although she was writing about narrative methodology, Riessman (1993) explained that transcription is the first part of the analysis—the

first time that the researcher becomes immersed in the data. I transcribed all of the interviews verbatim. First, I listened to the audio at regular speed and typed as much as possible. Then, I listened again at regular speed and typed more of the interview. The third time, I stopped and reversed the audio until all of the words were transcribed. In this way, I became more intimately familiar with the interview as a whole and with particular sentences as the transcription grew.

As mentioned in the section on data collection, I had originally planned to conduct all of the first interviews prior to conducting any of the second interviews. However, finding participants proved more challenging than initially anticipated. As a result, the interviews with participants were conducted at various stages, and I navigated between data collection and data analysis, shifting my focus between whole–part–whole throughout the five-month interview and transcription period.

I reviewed the transcription of the first interview in order to develop questions to clarify, expand, and explore emergent themes for that particular participant. These questions formed the first part of the second interview. In the early stages of data collection, I focused on each participant separately and developed themes based on the participant's experience with the phenomenon. These potential themes were placed under six broader categories: experience writing the first novel, meaning of writing the first novel, experience of publishing the first novel, meaning of publishing the first novel, learning experience, and motivation and challenges. At this stage, I was not attempting to identify the essential themes of the phenomenon, but was exploring all themes present for that particular novelist, even though many of these themes turned out to be incidental.

Van Manen (1990) explained that the hermeneutic conversation follows an analysis of the interview transcript in which the researcher identifies potential themes and then reflects on these

with the interviewee, keeping the phenomenon at the center of the conversation. Because I was setting up first interviews from March through June, I did not wish to miss essential themes by limiting incidental themes too soon in the data collection and early analysis stages. Furthermore, I did not want to lose openness to the data by categorizing too early. Creating a list of potential themes for each participant presented a great variety of themes, many of which turned out to be incidental, rather than essential. In the experience of writing, for instance, some early potential themes included writing the novel therapeutically, writing a rough draft continuously, having an idea based on a dream, writing in silence, enjoying the process of writing, having the whole story in one's head, being motivated by deadlines, having no consistency in one's schedule, working on a schedule of Monday through Friday, revising constantly, not revising until the rough draft was completed, envisioning the whole story arc, not forcing a plan to finish the novel, following psychology, writing as an adventure with a friend, being a very slow writer, loving editing, beginning writing unintentionally, using music to create mood, having characters talking in one's head, and seeing writing as like building a pearl—the idea gets bigger as the writer wraps things around it. These are just a few of the potential themes from each participant. These were varied, often seemingly unrelated, and sometimes even in conflict with one another.

Because the second interviews with some participants were completed before the first interviews with the participants from the summer data collection, the themes developed for the hermeneutic conversation were not themes across the data of all the participants, but themes developed from the interview with each participant. Consequently, each participant was given a copy of the potential themes generated from his or her first interview, and the conversations that followed involved clarifying and further exploring what the potential themes meant to their

experience of the phenomenon. Some participants had nothing to add to the potential themes presented to them.

However, several participants corrected misinterpretations. For example, one participant indicated in the first interview that she wrote what the Muse told her, but gave herself the freedom to go back and change things. I interpreted this to mean that the participant changed the actions of her characters as she revised the novel if she did not like what they did. However, the participant corrected this interpretation, saying that she did not make changes to what the characters did, only to the words used to describe their actions. Had this not been corrected through the conversation, this would have had significant implications for my explanation of one of the essential themes: the subject/object orientation of this participant. Another participant, while reviewing the themes, discussed her view of herself as someone growing as a writer and beginning to identify more as a writer than she had previously. This also helped to shape my view of the emerging themes.

In a future study, I would strive to conduct all of the first interviews, transcribe them, generate numerous potential themes by looking deeply and holistically at each individual interview, and then look across these lists to develop potential essential themes of the phenomenon. Only at that point would I schedule second interviews to ask clarifying and probing questions and to engage in hermeneutic conversations with the participants about these potential essential themes. Nevertheless, the hermeneutic conversations as conducted with the participants did yield some helpful results, as already described.

During the analysis, I returned again and again to the research questions, while looking back and forth between the parts and the whole and orienting the study to adult education theories. Vagle (2014) explained that

> all phenomenological research approaches that are routinely practiced have a substantive commitment to a whole-part-whole analysis method. In short, the whole-part-whole analysis methods stem from the idea that we must always think about focal meanings (e.g., moments) in relation to the whole (e.g., broader context) from which they are situated. (pp. 96-97)

Here, it is helpful to go further into detail about the analytical phase of balancing between parts and whole. This involves looking back and forth between the particulars. This process leads to emerging themes of parts of the experience and the essence of the whole phenomenon. The particulars are concrete descriptions that provide the context in which the universal phenomenon was experienced by that particular person at that particular time (van Manen, 1990). Creswell (2007) described this process as shifting between textural and structural descriptions of a phenomenon. Creswell (2007) characterized textural description as what the participant experiences, while structural description involves the context of his or her particular experience. Bringing them together allows the researcher to describe the "essence of the experience" (p. 60).

For this study, I moved between these phases of analysis in order to describe the phenomenon richly and deeply. In this way, the reader might experience the essence of the lived experience as "both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive" (van Manen, 1990, p. 39), and have a sense of being in dialogue with an experience he or she recognizes as true. Vagle (2014) described van Manen's (1990) approach to analysis as being comprised of three levels. First, the researcher reads the transcript holistically, getting an overall feeling of the themes. Second, the transcript is read selectively, highlighting chosen phrases. Finally, the researcher goes deeper still for a line-by-line review of the transcript. Van Manen (1990) did not advocate a linear approach to analysis. Indeed, the

researcher will often go back and forth between these various depths of analysis, just as the researcher will shift between whole and parts.

For this study, I began with a holistic reading of each individual participant's transcription before proceeding to deeper analyses through selective and line-by-line reviews. Furthermore, I shifted between reading through the individual participant's transcriptions, in order to understand the meaning within the context of that particular person, and reading between all of the participants' transcriptions, in order to uncover the emerging themes that linked the novelists' experiences.

In Vagle's (2014) description of van Manen's (1990) approach to phenomenology, he noted that the acts of uncovering essential themes, writing and rewriting to craft the phenomenological study, staying oriented toward the pedagogy of the study, and balancing the parts and whole are intertwined. Rather than seeing writing as the end process of a completed research study, van Manen (1990) saw the act of writing phenomenology as something similar to how an artist creates. Writing is a process in which meaning is explored in layers. "To be able to do full justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting (re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing)" (p. 131). Writing for re-thinking, re-flecting, and re-cognizing was essential to this study. Over 500 pages of data from nine very different participants led to many interesting findings, though not all were relevant to the research questions and purpose of this study. Van Manen (1990) explained that separating incidental themes from essential themes is one of the most difficult processes for the phenomenologist. Indeed I spent several months of exploration with the data before recognizing what was essential in this study. A first major writing of the findings explored existential themes for 60 pages. Van Manen (1990) suggested, "The four fundamental existentials of spatiality,

corporeality, temporality, and relationality, may be seen to belong to the existential ground by way of which all human beings experience the world" (p. 102) and, therefore, could provide a framework for writing about the phenomenon. The existential framework of this first major writing helped to bring the data into better focus, but upon further reflection and through discussions with my chair, I returned again to the research questions and purpose of the study. In doing so, I realized that, of these existentials, one did play an important role. That one was retained, while the others were set aside. Further analysis and rewriting led to a closer version of the final findings for this dissertation. Besides existential themes, van Manen (1990) offered other ways of framing the phenomenon, such as through the use of themes and examples. Both of these were utilized in further rewriting, which helped to direct the study back to the research questions and purpose of the study.

Time Line

On February 26, 2014, IRB approved the protocol. Data collection began in March 2014 and continued through July 2014. Early analysis began in April 2014. This analysis was an iterative process in conjunction with the writing of the final dissertation. The defense of this dissertation was March 19, 2015.

Summary

This phenomenological study sought to uncover the meaning of the lived experience of the novelist who first published in middle or later adulthood. Van Manen's (1990) suggestions for hermeneutic phenomenology were used as the principle guidelines for this study. His whole–parts–whole approach to theme analysis provided the framework for uncovering the themes and the meaning of the phenomenon. His emphasis on research writing as a process of discovery of

the meaning of the phenomenon was especially helpful in exploring the more than 500 pages of textual data on nine authors whose experiences and goals differed so greatly.

Chapter 4 presents the nine participants' contextual stories followed by an analysis of the shared themes uncovered when reading across the data in order to illuminate the phenomenon of the author and the experience with the first published novel.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Nine authors shared the story of their experience of writing and publishing their first novel through a brief questionnaire and two interviews. Each author spoke mostly of the experience of writing the novel, rather than the experience of publishing it. However, of the ones who self-published, several expressed frustration and disappointment, even as they remained proud of their accomplishment. This study was designed to discover the meaning of their experiences and to better understand both their motivation to accomplish their goal and the self-directed learning they pursued in the process. Many variations—some unexpected—existed in their personal stories of writing that first published novel. Despite this variation, several themes emerged from their individual experiences.

Profiles of Participants

Phenomenology focuses on the experiences of the participants. However, understanding the context of each individual participant is also important. These profiles include the participants' previous experience and interest in writing, as well as some information about their manuscript, writing practices, learning, publication experiences, and current writing interests. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used.

Caroline. Caroline was 53 and in graduate school when she woke up with a vivid image of a scene in her head. For the next three years, she began building scenes of a novel she described as crossing multiple genres, since it dealt with serious mental problems and controversial issues within a middle-age romance. She had thought about being a writer in childhood and had even typed a 50-page story after learning to touch type, although she later

threw it away. As an adult, Caroline did write and edit several self-help manuals to give to patients. However, as far as fiction went, she had thought about an idea for a story one afternoon, but it had not grabbed hold of her the way her first published novel had done; she did not even try to write it down. This first published novel was also her first attempt at writing a full-length novel manuscript.

Throughout the writing of the novel, Caroline never created a writing schedule, but "followed [her] psychology" and wrote scenes when she felt inspired to do so. "I went as it came to me. As it came to me. On a particular day or night as I was writing when the idea came to me or as I was combing through and came to a plot hole and it was like, oh, I know what goes in there and I would fill that in and that's how it worked, just kind of knitting itself together, here and there." She spoke frequently of the Muse, of the characters living their lives while she wrote things down, and of allowing the story to unfold in her subconscious. The story became "an obsession and a compulsion that I had to do in order to get it out of my head and get it out of my life." Because she allowed the story to come to her, rather than forcing her way from Chapter 1 to Chapter 2, she believed that the novel was "a fruitful personal endeavor" for her. Caroline never considered abandoning the novel because "these people had moved into my head and it was getting crowded in there." Completing the novel was the only way to get the characters to stop "dancing on [her] head" so that she could move on to something else.

Caroline's greatest emphasis on learning was content-related. She researched Ireland, the setting of her novel, by reading books, watching documentaries, and even traveling there—"breathing the air and drank the water and ate the food." She immersed herself in the culture at home by playing Irish music on a toy harp, cooking the food, and reading online newspapers to find the right voice. "Some people would say that was way too much work. It was fun work

learning stuff." She also studied psychology books to understand her characters and even did her own field research. "Most the time I was exploiting my friends and relations because I sometimes wanted to have reactions so I would say stuff to people sometimes that was calculated to elicit a reaction from them that I could possibly use."

When she finished writing the novel manuscript, she decided to self-publish without even considering traditional publication. She did not believe unknown authors could find an agent or a traditional publisher very easily, especially with a long novel that dealt with controversial mental health topics. She understood that authors are expected to market their work anyway, so self-publishing seemed to take out the middleman. Perhaps more importantly, she viewed those agents and traditional publishers as gatekeepers who imposed their views about what constituted a good novel, and she did not agree with their standards.

During the writing of her first published novel, Caroline had several other ideas for novels based on the characters in the first novel. At the time of the interview, she was writing the manuscript for her second novel, had plans for several other novels, and was in the process of creating an audiobook of the first novel.

Theresa. Theresa began writing her first novel at 54 and published it at 55. Only a few months earlier had Theresa pondered writing a novel, though she had not made plans to do so. For Theresa, the initial creation of the story came when she was gardening. "I would just get into a kind of meditative state and I'd start writing and something would start to come out of it." This happened several times over a matter of weeks as she started to write down the images that filled her mind. She admitted that she felt she "almost couldn't take credit" for the images that came to her, which she saw as "something creative coming out of me that is a gift." Months later, she reread the pages and realized that she had enough writing from these images to create a

novel. Her project became intentional as she realized she could turn it into a novel. Her story was based on her relationship with her husband and their home. The man was the protagonist in the story, and it told of the expansion of his love over time. While Theresa did not mention needing to learn anything for the content of the novel, she could see herself as growing as a writer with each book she wrote. The novel "was one more avenue or one more genre I feel I did. I don't want to put any judgments on those, whether it was good or bad but here is one more opportunity to expand my writing." Prior to writing this novel, she had attended numerous writing workshops and planned to continue to develop her craft.

Prior to writing this, Theresa had written and self-published several memoir-style books. When she first considered publishing her books, she spoke to traditionally published writers who told her if they could do it all over again, they would choose self-publishing. Additionally, she did not feel that she was ready to send her work out for critique. She generally gave her books as gifts to family and friends and did not try to promote them. This novel was her gift to her husband. She chose to have it published because she wanted the finished product to give to him, but he is the only person that she has allowed to read the book. So, for Theresa, there was never a question of trying to market her novel and earn money from her self-publication. It was always meant to be a gift to one.

At the time of the interviews, Theresa indicated that she was considering writing fiction that was further away from her personal experiences. She was also starting to find ways to share her writing beyond her family and friends. She still did not see herself as a writer, but as someone who writes. However, she believed that she was getting closer to developing a self-identity as a writer.

Eric. Eric began writing his novel at 55 and had it self-published when he was 56. This first novel began as an idea that popped in his head about a romance between two people who had both experienced divorce. Eric never set out to write a novel. "It's not a matter of gee, I'd like to write a novel. I never had that thought. I was just writing; there I was writing." He never had a writing schedule. Instead, when a scene came to him, he would write until he felt "the tank emptying," and then he would walk away. "I've never sat and stared at the screen and said come on, come on. Not once, not ever and I don't think I would." He attributed the ease with which he writes to his approach. "I don't say alright, it's eight in the morning and sit down at the screen and sit there until you write something. I don't do that to myself." Eric never used an outline to figure out the plot of his story. In fact, he started writing with the man as the main character, but soon realized the woman was the true protagonist. "I think the word evolved, evolution is very appropriate for the way I write." In the beginning, he began with a scene and continued to grow the story "like how an oyster builds a pearl. I've got a little tiny idea. What do I do with the idea?" With each idea, "you just keep wrapping stuff around it so once I'm up to halfway through the book or more, it just f-l-o-w-s." Another way Eric viewed the creation of his novel was as latticework. As he developed more scenes, "there's just more hooks to hang stuff on," which made it easy for him to develop another scene. Throughout the writing of the novel, Eric was "editing all the time, I'm tweaking all the time." When he thought the chapter was done, he "would do the big edit for that one. When I think it's done for me, I might read the whole thing over. But there's no plan, there's no, okay, it's time to edit chapter one thoroughly and put it away. No, it's at some point that happens."

Eric read a few books on writing. "I thought it would be arrogant, maybe foolish, to not at least see what they were saying and writing. How do you compose music? Everybody does it

differently." Instead, he focused on making his novel seem true to life. Part of this involved research to ensure that details were correct. "So I am scrupulous about facts. God bless Google. I check facts all the time."

Once he had completed the novel, Eric tried to find agents for about six months, but found that most of them were not looking for unknown authors. Previously, he had co-written a non-fiction book that had been published traditionally, but he was also aware of self-publishing. So, he began to research self-publishing, including reading some of the self-published books. Eventually, he chose a self-publishing package. He already had a loved one who acted as his editor, but he did choose to pay for some promotion. He also wrote letters to book clubs and bookstores. He continued to write two more novels, which he self-published and tried to market with very little success. At this point in his life, he is not willing to self-publish again and would only be willing to write another novel if he believed he could have it published traditionally, as he does not feel he should make poor financial decisions anymore. "If you are going to [write a novel] conscientiously, if you're going to be careful and pay attention to detail, and have it be realistic and all the things I talked about, only to have the world shrug, that ain't fun."

Clarissa. Clarissa wrote her first published novel from 41 to 43 years old with a friend and former colleague. Although she had wanted to write a novel as a child and had written some short stories and plays as a child and teenager, she had left fiction behind and turned to journalism in college and as a career. She and her friend decided they needed an adventure together. When the first adventure did not work out, they decided to write a mystery together.

During the writing of their first published novel, Clarissa and her partner met weekly at one of their houses to brainstorm. First, they developed an outline of the story and then met to plan for the chapters to be written the following week. During the brainstorming sessions with

her partner, Clarissa developed a list of words that helped her to understand what to write in the chapter. "I would just start with that and then it grew. Each piece of dialogue grew. Each description of the setting grew." The actual writing of the chapter could become tedious for Clarissa. "I really love editing but it's like pulling teeth to write the initial draft. I'm s-l-o-w." Still, she did not believe she suffered from writer's block during this time. "If nothing else, I could put down what we had talked about. So that was sort of an outline for that chapter. So I wasn't blocked as we did this book. I think all of our talking and popcorn eating and making it social is what kept me from getting blocked." Additionally, the partnership created a sense of accountability and excitement for Clarissa. "I knew [the writing partner] was going to see it and I anticipated that, looked forward to it." They encouraged each other as they focused on getting the story written. "We kept telling ourselves whenever we slowed down or whenever we thought we're never going to get done with this, etc., and we kept telling ourselves we can't get it right until we get it down." Once they completed the first draft, they began editing. They made most of the decisions as they sat together discussing the novel.

Clarissa had a background in journalism and her writing partner had been an avid mystery reader for years. They also had experience working with each other on research projects. Clarissa did not seek out additional writing instruction other than reading the publishing section of the *New York Times*. However, they researched information for their novel, to the point that the editor from the publishing company later told them they had too much research in the writing and had them delete some of the facts. "We were at the libraries. In fact, we decided we would always have our sleuth use the library as she solved the case."

Once they finished the novel, they queried publishers for several months. A few requested to see more of the manuscript, but did not accept it. Clarissa's husband, who also

wrote an unpublished novel, discovered that their lawyer acted as a book agent. The lawyer agreed to accept Clarissa and her friend as clients. Within a few months, he found a traditional publisher for their novel. The pair went on to write and publish a second mystery novel with the same sleuths. Clarissa found an exciting new career, and she and her friend ended their writing partnership. Since then, Clarissa has started pieces of writing, but has struggled to find the motivation to complete her work.

Marjorie. Marjorie wrote and published her first novel at 54. She worked for a publishing company as a proofreader and had written a few articles. The editor asked her if she would be interested in writing a proposal for a novel in a mystery series. She had already proofread some of the novels in this series and so was already familiar with the characters and the premise of the series. She agreed, and her proposal was accepted. Although Marjorie had thought about writing a novel in her 30s, she had never done anything about it other than write a few pages.

Because Marjorie had written a proposal to the publishing company, she already had an approved outline from which to work. She wrote her chapters chronologically, following the proposal. Still, she found that "it's been my experience every time, it's not as A to B to C as you think it's going to be. There's things that come up and say, oh, that's not going to work. So I'm halfway through the book and you realize I need to stick something in earlier because we need it here." The outline served as a guide for her so she would not "veer off to something else." She started with Chapter 1 and wrote in chronological order. Marjorie is a writer who finds editing and proofreading easier than writing the initial draft. "I mean sometimes you get on a roll. And other times it's a struggle. If I can get three or four pages done in a day, that's really good." As she wrote initially, she was "constantly revising. So there's no such thing as a first draft." Early

in the writing process, she wrote less but focused on rewriting. "What I have found is that I probably spend as much time on the first chapter as I do on the next six. Because I will read that over and over and over." Marjorie never followed a set schedule, though she preferred to work on the novel in the mornings when she could. As the novel deadline approached, she made more time for writing. "The deadline makes you motivated."

Marjorie had a professional background as a proofreader and had also published a few magazine articles. She had read some books on writing over the years, but nothing specific for the novel. "I really feel like that's what I've been doing over time. But no, I didn't sit down before I wrote this and say oh how do I do this? I know, I knew, how to do that." Instead, she researched background for the story, such as viewing websites of locations used in the novel and reading articles and books to understand background for the plot. "You want as many details as you can to make it as real or accurate as you can." Additionally, she wanted the readers to learn something new from her novel. "It's not *literature* in that sense. But even that, even just a book like a cozy mystery should tell you something you didn't know before."

After the first novel was published, Marjorie approached the editor to see if she could write more for the series. She has since written several novels and now divides her working time between proofreading and novel writing for this publisher.

Sandy. Sandy was 40 years old when she spent 90 days writing the novel she would first publish. Her novel had its birth in a vivid dream she had, which she shared with a friend. Her friend encouraged her to write it as a novel. The novel was a romantic comedy in the same genre that she frequently read, so she was very familiar with the format of the storyline. She had had a desire to write ever since childhood when she had written stories, "forcing them on my family to read." A high school teacher had discouraged her from pursuing a writing career, since it was

unlikely to be profitable. Nevertheless, she had continued to write poetry. Prior to this novel, she had begun writing a few manuscripts, which she later abandoned, not knowing where to go with them. She had been attempting to write in genres with which she was not very familiar as a reader.

After a month of thinking about her idea for a novel, Sandy set writing goals for herself to stay on target and knew how much she needed to write each night and each week. While she tried to get the pages written Monday through Saturday within a three hour timeframe after her daughter went to bed, she sometimes needed to add hours on Saturday or Sunday to catch up. Sometimes, she became so caught up in her writing that she wrote late into the night and early morning. The plan to write her novel in 90 days helped her to focus on accomplishing her goal. "Getting the story out on paper was the most important thing, but I wanted to finish, the idea of actually finishing what I started."

Sandy was very familiar with the genre in which she was writing and so knew approximately how many pages the novel should be. She worked from an outline in her head. "Just like somebody watching a movie, I was able to sit and just tell the whole story in my head, what they are going to say, how they are going to act, and what they are going to do. I work it out in my head." So, even before she began writing the first pages, she already knew the basics of the story and how it would end. She wrote the rough draft in chronological order. She saved the editing for later, although she did make footnotes on the paper copy to remind her of changes she needed to make. As soon as she finished the rough draft, she took two weeks' vacation time and began editing.

For Sandy, completing the novel proved that she could return to school for a writing career. "So I really want to give this whole new career in my life a shot. So it was kind of a

test." She described herself as hardheaded and said "when I really believe in something I'm doing, I don't really doubt that I'm going to finish it." Also, the characters were vivid to her; she could picture everything in her head. "If I like a story enough that I can already create the whole story in my head before I even begin to write, then I *know* I'm going to finish it because I can't stop thinking about it."

Sandy did not research the craft of writing and did very minimal research for the content of her novel. She only made a couple visits to websites to check a few facts. She did have an extensive background of analytical reading, having observed a high school English teacher reading that way. She would highlight books she really enjoyed and study the different elements of the stories. However, for her novel, she just focused on writing it and did not consider the need to learn anything new. Only later did she evaluate her manuscript with critical eyes and realize that she had much to learn about writing a novel. Since then, she has attended numerous writing conferences and earned a degree in writing. She now spends time extensively researching the content of her books. She still feels pride in the accomplishment of writing her first novel and could "appreciate the learning curve that I had. It taught me a lot and even the situation with the publishing and that whole ordeal, it made me think more carefully about what I wanted in the future when I wrote, how I wanted to handle it."

The ordeal Sandy referred to was contracting with a publisher she believed was traditional because they advertised themselves that way. She later came to realize they were "a kind of scam in that they said they were traditional publishing but it was paid for publishing." Sandy found a friend who created the cover for her, and she did a few edits for the novel. The published novel had spacing issues, but "it was still my first completed work," which she shared with her mother and friends. After this novel, Sandy had two more books self-published through

a different company. She has been working on some short stories and other manuscripts but does not plan to self-publish again, except perhaps through ebooks, since some writers have been able to gather a following and then find a traditional publisher for the printed version.

Molly. Molly was 62 when she began to write her first novel soon after an enforced, early retirement. By 63, she had it self-published. She wrote a novel that was largely an account of her own personal experiences, although she changed the names and many of the actual events in the book. In fact, years earlier she had therapeutically written a fictionalized account of her experiences. Later, she took this manuscript as the basis of her first published novel, though with some significant changes to the plot.

When Molly decided to write her first novel, she said, "The first couple weeks, I was sitting here in my PJs, typing away, get up and go do something else. I realized after being a professional salesperson for 35 years that this is not going to get this *done*. So I set myself a schedule. You've got to get up, have your coffee and have your breakfast. *Dress!* Sit down and start working." Molly chose a 9 to 5 schedule, 7 days a week, although she often found herself writing late in the night or at 3 a.m. on occasion. She kept this schedule for a number of weeks until she had completed her novel. Molly thought she waited a week before editing and completed a few drafts before searching for a publisher.

Molly used the fictionalized memoir-type novel for reference as she began to create the novel she would publish. She wrote the rough draft continuously, writing from page one all the way through, and also writing the characters' lives chronologically from age one up. The only editing she did for the rough draft was "oh, wait a minute type things" as she was "just skimming through it." After the rough draft, she revised three or four quick drafts before looking for a publisher.

While Molly's plot and characters were largely determined from her own life, she did add some different plot turns that she credited to the spirit of her deceased lover. "Believe it or not, he would wake me up in the middle of the night and say no, no, no. Change this." She described this experience of receiving the plot as "coming out of a deep sleep or maybe going farther. I'm not sure how it works." Molly described that while writing "the words keep coming out. Evidently it's something that I should do because it keeps coming like I try to shut it off and it doesn't work."

Molly did little research for her novel, although she did revisit places from her childhood in order to refresh her memory for the plot and setting of her novel. She did not utilize resources on writing. "Nope. I knew everything about it. I just need to sit down and write it and I thought the editors were going to fix it for me. I was in la la land so to speak." After self-publishing her first novel, Molly realized that she needed to improve her writing skills by attending conferences, buying reference books, and reading novels as a writer. She now also does extensive research for the content of her novels, filling binders for reference.

She chose to self-publish after learning that it is difficult for an unknown author to find an agent or traditional publisher. She has two printed editions of her first novel, but realized that the quality of her first novel was still lacking. Although she has self-published two more novels through the same company, she did not feel that she was finished with the first novel. The interview process seemed to reactivate a need in her to return to the novel to substantially rewrite and republish it, although she was already working on several other manuscripts.

Brad. Brad was 79 when he began to write a historical mystery, which he published at 80. Brad first realized that he wanted to write a novel in his 40s when he attended a seminar to create his bucket list. As a businessman with a family, he did not believe that he had the time to

write. Upon retirement, he wanted something to do and considered writing. As he searched the history of his own ancestors, he decided to write a story based on his fictional speculations of a divorce.

Originally, his male ancestor was the protagonist, but, after writing the first chapter, he realized that the female ancestor was the one he would focus on. After he started writing, then he chose to outline the story. From that point on, he followed the outline and wrote chronologically. His plot involved a murder, and he did not know for certain the identity of the murderer until he wrote the ending. Nevertheless, he moved from Chapter 1 to Chapter 2, doing some editing along the way.

Brad frequently left his house to write. "It really made me feel more like you're in a profession and you're trying to do a job now." Also, he chose to write in nature because he found "it a very creative atmosphere"; he wrote more in these settings. He was also motivated by attending writing conferences. "It makes you think, one thing, these people wrote books. I can write a book. You're not out there in never never land by yourself."

During the first half of the novel, Brad enjoyed the experience of writing and took time to develop the characters and research the scenes by traveling to historical sites, reading, and watching documentaries. During the second half of the writing process, Brad started to feel in a hurry to finish the novel. He described his novel as "a labor of love." He wanted to see the book published and share it with people he knew, because "it meant to me that even though I am older, that I can still be creative and contribute something that will hopefully last through the years."

Of all the authors interviewed, Brad was the only one who devoted extensive time and resources to both learning about the content of his novel and the craft of writing. He read books and articles on the historical setting, watched documentaries, found assistance from librarians

and park rangers, and visited over half a dozen historical sites. Besides attending numerous writing conferences, Brad hired an editor to revise and offer suggestions. While he did read a few books on writing, he said "but none of them tell you exactly how to create. It's subjective. You can read about how to develop a plot but you have to create it yourself."

Brad chose to self-publish because, given his age, he was not certain he would have the time to wait through all the rejections before finally receiving an acceptance letter. He also did not know if he had the patience to deal with waiting for agents and traditional publishers to accept his work. At the time of the interview, he was writing another novel with the granddaughter of his main character from the first novel as the protagonist. This time he was taking his time to develop the story. "This second one, it's going to be better. It's going to be longer. I'll try to make it as interesting as the first one but more comprehensive."

John. Although John had liked to write as a child, he had focused on his career as an adult. Prior to retiring, he had written a few things, but with his retirement, he had taken up writing as a serious hobby to keep himself occupied. He had written several novel-length manuscripts, but he had not been able to find a publisher for them. He had decided to write some short stories to try to get some publishing credentials and had begun writing a series of science fiction stories featuring one character, which he had worked on between ages 73 and 76. He had attended a writers' conference and described the exploits of his main character to an agent, thinking he could create a compilation of short stories. The agent had suggested he create a novel.

Although John already had numerous short stories featuring his main character, creating a novel involved new material and was not simply a matter of connecting the stories. While he did not write an outline, he knew in his head the overall plot and character arcs of the novel before

he started writing. For each particular scene as he wrote it, he had "a very detailed picture in my own mind of what the scene is, of who the character is, what he looks like, what's going on. You always have a picture of that in your mind." He described himself as the director of a movie. "You have to set the scene, you have to put your character in it and all the people he's interacting with and this kind of thing. What's going on?" While he could visualize the entire scene "just like you're seeing a Technicolor vista vision movie, but then you have to think how do I get that across to the reader?" At that point, he determined which details were relevant and included those in his scene.

John wrote chronologically, but he shifted from one writing project to another depending on his mood and priorities. He enjoys the process of writing. "While I'm writing, I generally enjoy writing and I enjoy doing it and I enjoy seeing the story come to life." He also had a drive to see his work published. "Plus I like to create and so the motivation was to create something and then get it recognized somewhere." Even after the agent asked him to write his stories as a novel, John continued to work on multiple writing projects. However, he did focus on this novel as a priority and completed it within 6 to 8 months after the agent's request.

While writing the novel, John did not feel the need to research the content. The main character was "the synthesis of every fighter pilot I ever knew." The plot ideas came from a combination of his imagination and his experiences in the military. "That's why I like science fiction, not much research because you can make it up as you go along." However, John spent time building his craft as a writer. He started by writing stories and posting them to online fan magazines where he studied the critiques. "I think I learned quite a bit. About every 1 out of 4, 5 [comments] you get, somebody would say well, this is what you need to do here to improve this here and I'd suggest this." In addition, he attended writing workshops and seminars to learn

about publishing and considered this an equivalent to earning an associate's degree. He did not care for books on writing. "Most of the books are run, Spot, run." However, he found that the *Writer's Digest* articles "are very helpful in helping you to learn how to write about emotions and writing good dialogue." Finally, he studied the novels written by other authors. "From reading different books, you do get insights." When he came across a well-written passage, he studied it to see how the author conveyed different emotions. Experience, he believed, was most important to becoming a better writer.

Once John completed the novel, he sent it to that agent, who rejected it. John set it aside and turned his attention to other writing for the next year until somebody told him about a novel contest. Since this one was already finished, he sent it in and received second place in the contest. The publishing company sponsoring the contest contacted him because they wanted to publish it. He looked at the contract to make sure it was not a self-publishing company and accepted the offer from this small publishing company. He has since published another novel with them and is completing several more. He is also in the process of reading his first published novel to create an audiobook.

Results

The research questions for this study were:

1. What meaning does the author place on the experience of writing and publishing the first novel?
2. How did this meaning influence the author's self-directedness and motivation to accomplish this goal?

Each of the nine participants was interviewed twice. During this time, I transcribed the interviews and wrote reflections on the interviews. After transcribing the first interview with a

participant, I analyzed the text to identify the preliminary themes of that individual, paying close attention to the particulars of the story, before returning to conduct a second interview. The second interview included a discussion of the themes from the first interview, clarification, and additional questions. Throughout this process, I shifted between looking at the individuals and across all of the participants to determine larger themes. After transcribing the second interviews, I returned first to each participant's individual interviews and then began to look across all the interviews. After several months of analysis and looking deeply into the particulars of the data and how they fit with the emerging themes related to the research questions, the essential themes of the phenomenon were uncovered.

Themes serve the purpose of organizing a study. Themes help the researcher to uncover meaning and point to certain aspects of a lived experience. The lived experience has "infinite variety in forms—theme fixes or expresses the ineffable *essence* of the notion of a temporary and exemplary form" (van Manen, 1990, p. 88). Using themes to describe a phenomenon helps the researcher to express the essence or core of the phenomenon, even while realizing that "no thematic formulation can completely unlock the deep meaning . . . of a notion" (p. 88).

The nine participants displayed great variety in their approaches to writing and their reasons for writing and publishing their first novel. Four themes were uncovered that emphasize the meaning, motivation, and learning processes involved for the participants. These themes were then reviewed by peers and the committee chair for their validity and trustworthiness. Van Manen (1990) encouraged phenomenological researchers to move between concrete descriptions of the particulars in order to develop a better understanding of how the phenomenon was experienced universally. With this in mind, the following themes are explored with supporting quotes from the data, and moving between the particular and the universal.

Theme 1: Influence of the Writer's Subject/Object Orientation

Van Manen (1990, 2014) gave a variety of suggestions for deciding how to organize themes in a phenomenological study. One approach is to explore the lived experience through the universal existentials of lived time, space, body, and relationality to others, i.e., "to explore meaning aspects of our lifeworld and of the particular phenomena that we may be studying" (van Manen, 2014, p. 303). As the participants described their experiences of writing, they naturally spoke of time as they described routines or schedules or their disdain for them. Some authors maintained control over the time aspect of their novel by creating outlines in advance and writing chronologically. Others wrote as the scenes revealed themselves. Space had varying importance. Some needed certain attributes in their space, at least for certain portions of the writing, such as music, quiet, social interaction, nature, and props to remind them of the story. Others paid little attention to the space in which they wrote. The authors showed great variety in the support they sought from others. Of all the existentials, the experience of the body of the writer as object or subject of the story seemed to be most significant to the process of writing.

The writer as subject exhibits control over the novel, exemplified by engaging in the writing process through schedules, outlines, and deliberate choices to change the characters or events of the story to suit the writer's preference. The writer as object opens to the mystery of the creative process, exemplified by developing relationships with the characters and doing their bidding, and waiting for inspiration from the Muse to write a scene. To some extent, no writer is completely the subject or completely the object, but rather the process of writing and completing a novel involves some balance between the two—between receiving and shaping the story. The degree to which the author perceived himself or herself as the subject or creator of the work and

object or receiver of the story influenced decisions about the writing practices employed to complete the novel.

To better understand the subject/object dynamic, it is helpful to first view an example of subject and object clearly illustrated in one person. Caroline expresses both subject and object orientations at various times in the writing and publishing process. She saw herself as the object in receiving the story, but also as the subject in preparing the story's appearance for publication. Caroline did not decide to give her characters certain personality traits or choose the next step in the plot. "I wasn't consciously trying to make it up. It was happening in my mind and I was observing and writing it down." She had a strong aversion to one of her characters. "I didn't want to write scenes that had that person in it. It was just like ugghyay. Not my type. Icky poo." When the Muse explained why the character behaved as he did, "now I understand. I still don't like what he's doing but now I can write about him because I know why he's doing this." Her son wondered why she took so long to finish writing the book. "I can't just up and finish this. It has to evolve into its ending. This is people's lives they're living. It's not my story." Because she held this view, when she had no ideas for writing scenes, she did not force herself to write. She believed that her characters were not "in the mood to share their secrets. I may suddenly find that they've all gone missing. And they're in their house. The door's locked. The windows are closed. The blinds are pulled. I can lean up against there and I can listen and I can maybe hear music, people talking and laughing, voices going on in there." She understood that something needed to happen in her subconscious before the characters would share their secrets with her. "So you take these things [experiences from life] and your brain has to shuffle them around and they have to kind of ferment in a place." During this time, she would check in on the characters in the house, and if she found an open door, she would "find a dark corner, and then

watch and write it down." In the meantime, she had other work to do, such as editing the scenes she had already written and researching the psychology of her characters or the setting.

In other ways, Caroline was very much the subject creating her *Gesamtkunstwerk,* total work of art, a word her son used to describe her manuscript. Besides her intensive research, she edited, paying attention to nuances of the language. The Muse told Caroline what happened in the story, and she wrote it down. However, she reserved the right to change the words used in describing the ugly behaviors of her characters and edited the scenes throughout the process of writing the novel. She placed great value on the language she used. "We have a beautiful language with all kinds of words that we borrowed from all kinds of other cultures. Why can't we use it? We can use it. It's beautiful. It paints pictures in people's heads." Because Caroline was unwilling to compromise on her book, its content, length, or style, she did not even try to find an agent or traditional publisher, but chose to self-publish. She did not pay any money for services from the company, but spent hours creating the cover, fixing formatting issues, and choosing font styles. She cared not only about what she wrote in the novel, but how it was presented to the reader. "As a physical experience of people reading it, I wanted to be able to transmit the feeling of these people being crazy by the way I would punctuate it." She took care in reading the contracts of the self-publishing companies, rejecting to use Amazon's Kindle because she felt that the contract language was rude and that the company placed too many restrictions on her rights as an author. In every step of the self-publishing and marketing, Caroline maintained careful control.

A few other authors had a strong sense of themselves as the object receiving the story. They did not use outlines to guide the plot, nor did they force themselves to write at certain times. Theresa received images and paragraphs of thoughts unexpectedly while gardening or

cooking. "I've heard some people talk about writing in terms of you need to be able to sit down and write every day or every morning. I hear writers talk about that. In the morning I get up and write and it may not be any good at all but I force myself to write and there's this discipline and practice. And that isn't for me." While these authors refused to force themselves to create scenes, they did not always mind choosing times to sit down to edit. "Editing can take place any time and doesn't take the same energy as writing. That is kind of like a different part of my brain is working from when I'm editing versus I'm writing."

Other authors viewed themselves more as the subject in control of the story. They all had an outline—either written or in their mind—of the story as they began writing. Sandy's story came from a vivid dream, yet she chose the characteristics for her characters. In her own life, she had some unpleasant ex-stepchildren, so she chose to make her main character's stepchildren into pleasant, well-behaved children. "I was playing with the dream of what I wanted things to be compared to what they were. It was my story. I could do what I wanted to." These authors utilized writing schedules or routines, or had deadlines to follow. Sandy chose to write her novel in 90 days, wrote when her daughter was in bed and on weekends, and knew how many pages and chapters she needed to complete to stay on target. So, she worked with both a schedule and a deadline. Molly set a schedule of writing 9 to 5 daily. Brad and John followed writing routines, such as writing in the mornings about five days a week. Only Marjorie and Clarissa did not try to write for a certain number of days each week. However, Marjorie did have a deadline from the publisher, and Clarissa had a weekly deadline to complete her chapter before she met with her writing partner again. "It helped enormously that [the writing partner] had this expectation that I would have it done."

Although these participants exercised control over the creative process, none of them could explain the mystery of the creative process. Brad spoke of believing in "these little guys in the back of the head" that helped him when he encountered difficulties determining how to write a scene. Clarissa described long car rides with her husband as a space in which "I can almost feel a physical change in my head, kind of switching from analytical thinking to so called right brain thinking." She found this helpful in writing the chapters. Though Molly used her own life experiences and people she knew as the basis for her novel, she attributed the plot changes to the spirit of her deceased love. "Believe it or not, he would wake me up in the middle of the night and say no, no, no. Change this." She described this experience as "coming out of a deep sleep or maybe going farther. I'm not sure how it works." Even the authors who spoke of "my imagination" and rejected the idea of a muse, still thought of their characters as living, almost separate from themselves. Sandy's comment that "the characters are really real to me while I'm writing a story" was representative of all the participants. If John struggled to think of what came next, he would interview his characters. "In my mind, just like I'm talking to them. Oh, what do you think of this guy and wait for an answer and most of the time it will come."

Theme 2: Motivation Found in the Story, Process, and Goal

The participants found varying degrees of motivation from the story itself, the process of writing, and the goal of completing the novel and having it published to share with others. Sometimes the motivation shifted. For instance, Theresa's initial motivation for writing came from the story with the images and words that came to her and an appreciation for the creative process that she recognized as a gift. While she did not go seeking out the story and the creativity, she opened herself up to their presence. When she reread her writing, she "realized

there was something of value, that I want to finish it," and then she made time in her schedule to complete the novel.

When the story had the most pull for the authors, it felt like "an obsession and a compulsion that I had to do in order to get it out of my head and get it out of my life" as Caroline described it. Often the characters drew the authors in. Eric described this process when he said, "they start talking! And I have to write down what they're saying." Other times the plot itself revealed itself clearly to the writer. In the case of Sandy, she had a vivid dream and realized she could model a novel after it. "If I like a story enough that I can already create the story in my head before I even begin to write, then I *know* I'm going to finish it because I can't stop thinking about it."

Most of the participants used the word "fun" to describe the writing process. For those authors who allowed the story to unfold, "following [their] psychology" rather than a schedule, the process of writing allowed them to discover the evolution of their story. Caroline remembered, "It was a very exciting period of my life. It was fun most of the time. I spent a lot of time laughing." Even when the participants followed schedules and struggled with scenes, they still had an overall favorable experience with writing. "Generally speaking, I thoroughly enjoyed creating the scenes and creating the characters. I looked forward to writing every day."

Completing the novel was a major goal for many of the participants. Like many of the authors, Sandy "wanted to finish, the idea of actually finishing what I started." Even the authors who were later disappointed in the quality of their book still felt great pride in completing the novel. Many of the participants chose to have their manuscripts self-published. Theresa explained, "When it's bound and when there's a cover and a picture and all of that, it feels like it's final. It feels like it's done. It kind of validates the experience."

Theme 3: Meaning Found in Experience and Accomplishment

Across the board, the participants spoke at greatest length about the experience of writing the novel. This is where they found the most meaning. Theresa explained that "the writing is very personal so it's meaningful in that respect. And then the creative part of it is meaningful for me in the sense that there is something coming out of me that is creative and that it is a gift so it's all of those things." Several participants found meaning in their growth as writers. Sandy felt writing the first novel "is really an invaluable experience in understanding yourself as a writer and what you need to do to improve your writing."

The participants also found meaning in their sense of accomplishment in having completed a full-length manuscript and publishing it. Clarissa, whose novel was traditionally published, believed that "the accomplishment in my view is really in the doing. I think it's a fantastic thing to have been able to have written a book length fiction or nonfiction piece. If it never gets published, it never gets published. But I mean the accomplishment to me is in the doing." Similarly John explained "the writing is a sense of accomplishment. You feel like you accomplished something, that you have created something." For many of the participants, the desire to write a novel had been lifelong. Publishing the novel gave Molly "a sense of I can do this. Something I've always wanted to do in my life. It was the bucket list and it got marked off finally." For some, the accomplishment also gave a sense of continued purpose. Brad, a retired businessman, said, "It meant to me that even though I'm older, that I can still be creative and contribute something that will hopefully last through the years."

Theme 4: Lessons Learned

The participants chose learning activities related to developing the content of the novel, such as researching setting, historical details, or psychology of characters, or to developing the

writing craft. Participants tended to have more interest in either content or writing craft and the level of learning varied greatly from one participant to the next. Additionally, the participants learned through the experience of writing their first published novel or through reflection after they had time away from their project. Further, the extent to which participants engaged in self-directed learning activities was related to a passion for learning or a perceived need to learn.

Type of learning varied in terms of content, craft, and experience. In writing their novels, the participants had opportunities to learn in three main categories: the content of the novel, the development of their writing craft, and the experience of writing and publishing the novel. Most learning in terms of content involved fact checking or light research related to setting, characters, or plot details. Several authors drew heavily on their personal experiences and chose settings with which they were already familiar. They did little more than check a few websites for details. Since Sandy based her characters on compilations of herself and people she knew, she did only a quick Google search for a few facts "because my fictional characters were very much in my head already. I was pulling from things I already knew. It made writing so much easier for my first novel." On the other end of the spectrum were Caroline and Brad, who both collected enough materials for their novels to fill several bookcases. Caroline took one trip to Ireland, which was a struggle due to finances and mobility issues. Brad had the means and time to do extensive traveling for his novel. Caroline immersed herself in the setting at home by creating an Irish atmosphere through music and food, while Brad sought the assistance of librarians and park rangers to help him to understand the historical era of his novel, in addition to conducting independent research. Most of the participants fell somewhere in the middle, researching setting or plot details until they knew more about the subjects than they would actually include in the novel. Clarissa noted that she and her partner put so many details from

their research into their novel manuscript that “one of the editor’s criticisms about the book was that there was too much of that.”

Developing the writer’s craft can entail reading novels with a writer’s eye, reading books or magazines on writing, joining critique groups, or attending conferences. Because the craft develops over time, some of the learning for the participants began in childhood, as many of the future published authors had been avid readers, had journaled intensively, and had written short stories to share with their families. Additionally, several of the participants had had some kind of background in professional writing before beginning the novel manuscript: Clarissa had a career in journalism, Marjorie worked as a proofreader and had published a few magazine articles, Theresa was involved with academic writing, Eric was the co-author of a published nonfiction book, and Caroline had self-published some self-help writing for her clients in healthcare. Many of them had read a few books on writing throughout the years. For some of the authors, this previous experience seemed to be enough. They were readers; they had written before; they could write a novel without spending any additional time studying the craft from others. Marjorie said, “I didn’t sit down before I wrote this and say oh, how do I do this? I know, I knew how to do that.” Others read a few books on the craft while writing their manuscript. Caroline explained after a few months of writing, “I was thinking am I doing this correct? I don’t know. But it feels right what’s happening to me.” She found some of the books helpful, but mostly she felt validated that she intuitively understood how to develop plot and characters in a novel. She also rejected some of the advice, believing that even though they were experts in her genre, she wanted to write in the style that she liked to read. “There are people who want to be gatekeepers who say thou shalt not write no other way. And it’s rather dumbed down.” Over the years since she started writing and self-publishing autobiographical materials,

Theresa had participated in a number of writing seminars and retreats. While she did not mention attending writing workshops specifically for her first novel, she saw herself as growing as a writer and planned to continue learning from the writing community. John developed his craft through careful study of well-written novels, reading articles on specific writing techniques, submitting his work to an online critiquing community, and attending enough conferences to form "the equivalent of an associate's degree." After he felt he had outgrown the online critique group, he found a face-to-face one where he continued to share his work with other writers and to learn from them.

Although John attended many writing seminars and groups, he felt he learned best from the experience of writing itself. He had already completed a handful of manuscripts prior to publishing his first one. For most of the participants, however, the first published novel was also the first completed full-length manuscript. Marjorie stated, "Before you do it, you don't really know that you can. A lot of people say I want to write a book. I'm just saying that is something I learned about myself, that I really can do it." Other participants planned on making a few changes in their approaches to their next novel. Brad was spending more time developing his characters; Caroline now knew to avoid formatting issues by using just one computer. The biggest changes came from the two participants who did the least learning during the writing of their first published novel. Both Molly and Sandy recognized that they needed to develop their writing craft by attending conferences and reading books on writing, and Sandy earned a degree in writing. Both of them now do comprehensive research for their novels and give themselves time away from their manuscripts before editing. As Molly explained when talking about two of her novels, "There are certain things I did in this book, I'm not doing in this book." Molly and Sandy also learned to be more discerning about the self-publishing companies. However, Molly

gave conflicting messages about the self-publishing process; although she did not trust that they were reading her manuscripts, she continued to take their advice at different times. At the end of the interviews, she still had not made a decision to leave the self-publishing company she distrusted, but she indicated that she had learned from her experiences. "I learned the main lesson is to make sure I understand what I'm actually getting for my money. If I'm going to be doing self-publishing, I need to know what exactly are you doing for me."

Self-directed learning involved passion or perceived need. After describing adapting Irish tunes to a lap harp, Caroline said, "Some people would say that was way too much work. It was fun work, learning stuff. People that say oh history is boring. Oh, I found it fascinating, especially when I found all these groddy things that happened." Theresa sees herself on a path, growing as a writer. "I would say in the last four years, whenever I get the opportunity to go to a workshop on writing, I will go." When John became serious about writing, he attended his first conference, he said, "that was a real eye-opener because I thought boy, I don't know anything about this business and I better learn." To learn more about writing, he joined critique groups online, and later face-to-face, read articles on writing, carefully scrutinized the elements of novels, and attended enough conferences to feel he had learned knowledge equivalent to earning an associate's degree. As discussed in Theme 4, the participants did not have equal interest in terms of researching the content of their novel and developing their craft as writers. Only Brad engaged in both passionately. However, several of the authors enjoyed the learning they did pursue for the first novel. As Caroline said, "I'm a very committed continuous learner."

Others did only what they felt was necessary. Although Eric felt strongly about checking facts for his novel, he said, "I do as much research as I think is needed." While Marjorie enjoyed the process of research and learned more than she needed to put in the novel, she still stayed

focused on what was needed. "You want as many details as you can to make it as real or as accurate as you can." Neither Molly nor Sandy perceived a need to do more than check a few facts online during the writing and publishing of their first novel. In fact Molly believed "I just need to sit down and write it and I thought the editors were going to fix it for me" and so she did not perceive a need to learn more about the craft of writing or do much research for the plot and characterization of her novel. After their disappointments with the publishing process and some time away from writing the novels, they both realized that they needed to learn how to become better writers, which included both developing the craft and researching the content of their novels. Indeed, their current practices more closely resemble Caroline's and Brad's in immersing themselves in the research for the setting, characters, and plot of their novel; like Brad, John, and Theresa, they have a desire to continue to grow as writers by availing themselves of the community of writers through conferences, developing relationships with writers, and reading books to help them.

Balancing the Parts and the Whole

The data from this study illuminated many important differences between the participants. These differences showed the context from which these authors wrote their novels. Yet the details could easily hide the essential themes and so a balance was needed to show the contexts of the individual experiences and how those experiences interrelated to demonstrate the essential themes present for all of the participants during the process of writing and publishing their first novel. Here, the parts and whole of the findings are summarized.

The nine authors differed from one another in many ways. Only three found traditional publishing for their first novel. Of these, one was asked to write a proposal for a multi-author mystery by an editor familiar with her proofreading work; another was contacted by a small

publisher after winning second place in a manuscript contest; and the third wrote a mystery as an adventure with a good friend—together they found an agent and sold this first novel and a second to a large publishing house. One author believed she had contacted a traditional publisher, but later realized that they operated more like a self-publishing company. Of the five who chose to take their manuscripts to a self-publishing company, one author did so because she wanted to maintain the integrity of her work; several authors chose this course because they believed that few new authors could find an agent or traditional publisher; another author was elderly and felt in a hurry to get his novel published while he still had time; and yet another chose to self-publish because she only ever intended to share her novel with her husband. The authors also displayed many differences in their approach to writing, the kinds of stories they wrote, and what led them to begin writing. Finding the similarities that connected them took some time and involved some sifting through the data and then drawing back to look again at the research questions in order to synthesize the more than 500 pages of interview data into fewer pages, focusing on meaning, motivation, and learning.

Of those 500 pages, the majority of text related to the experience of writing the novel. The questions about meaning were answered, often reluctantly, with a few sentences that rarely showed the same passion that many of the authors expressed when remembering their relationships with their own characters, the wonder of the story unfolding, or the sense of accomplishment when they finally completed their work. The experience itself was most significant, and in it the meaning was found. There were many variables in this experience of writing, as varied as the writers themselves. What became clear, however, was this experience of the self as both subject and object in developing the novel. Some authors were clearly objects, receiving the story as a gift or mystery. Still, even these authors as objects asserted themselves

as subjects in order to complete the novel through editing and other preparations. Other authors were more clearly subjects, planning outlines and schedules, and determining when the novel would be completed; they exhibited only a shadow of the object—a small acceptance of the mystery of the subconscious in bringing characters to life and leading them from A to B when they became stuck. The experience as subject and object influenced the authors' choices of time and space in writing the novel, which contributed to the motivation they had in writing and completing their works, whether they focused on meeting deadlines and following schedules or anticipating the unfolding of the story and discovering more about their characters.

The authors were motivated by the story itself, either the plot or characters that inspired them to start, the process of writing as subject or object, and the sense of accomplishment in finishing what they started—something of great magnitude. The meaning the authors expressed again reflected the experience of writing, intertwined with their subject/object orientation and their motivation for writing, and the sense of accomplishment in knowing that, whatever else, they had written and published a book that they could hold in their hands and share with family and friends.

This study sought to find how the authors engaged in self-directed learning in the process of writing and publishing their first novels. Nearly all of the authors did indeed direct their learning either regarding the content or the craft of writing. Only a few authors, however, showed the spirit of a self-directed learner, demonstrating a passion for discovering more about the setting or the psychology of the characters, or seeking out opportunities to develop their writing skills and knowledge by availing themselves of the many resources available to writers—from magazines on writing to conferences or critique groups. Two participants did little more than check a few websites. Nevertheless, they learned through the experience of writing that

first novel and later, after reflection, became passionate self-directed learners for their subsequent novels. The final themes were that self-directed learning took place in terms of the content of the novel, the development of the craft of writing, and through the experience of writing that first novel. This learning varied and was influenced by the passion the person had for self-directed learning and the perceived need to learn more. The experience of writing the first novel and the later reflection on that process sometimes brought about a change in the author's subsequent learning habits.

Summary

Nine published authors participated in a phenomenological study of their experience of writing and publishing their first novel. Each participant completed a questionnaire and participated in two interviews, including a discussion of the uncovered themes relating to their experience. The phenomenological practice of Van Manen (1990) was used as a guide, with its focus on striking a balance between the particulars of each individual experience expressed through concrete descriptions and the essence of the whole phenomenon given shape by themes.

Four themes emerged from the study of the participants' experience with the writing and publishing their first novel: (a) influence of the writer's subject/object orientation; (b) motivation found in the story, process, and goal; (c) meaning found in the experience and accomplishment; and (d) lessons learned. Chapter 5 concludes this study, describing the findings and how they can be applied to future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This phenomenological study of first-time published novelists in middle and older adulthood was designed to discover the meaning they place on the experience of writing and publishing a novel. It also examined how this meaning influenced the participants' self-directed learning and motivation to accomplish the goal. Using purposive sampling, nine novelists shared their experiences through two interviews and one questionnaire. Four main themes were uncovered through thematic data analysis influenced by van Manen's (1990) approach to phenomenology. This process unfolded by shifting between the parts and the whole in order to discover the essence of the phenomenon. The novelist's view of the self as the subject or object influenced the writing process. Motivation was found in the story itself, in the process of writing and publishing, and in the achievement of the final goal. Meaning was found in both the experience itself and in the sense of accomplishment upon completion. Learning varied for each of the novelists, depending on their approach to the content, craft, and experience, and whether they engaged in self-directed learning because of a passion or perceived need.

Summary

The stories that these nine authors shared about their experience with their first published novel had many variations. Indeed, it required a great deal of analysis, including some false leads, to be able to see the commonalities that brought them together. The writers in this study demonstrated that their perception of themselves as the subject or object of the story influenced the process they used to develop and complete the manuscript. They were motivated to write through some combination of interest in the story idea itself, the process of writing, and the goal of completing what they started. The meaning they found was in the actual experience of

writing, which they all described to some degree as an enjoyable process, and in the sense of pride in their accomplishment, whether they published the novel traditionally or through self-publishing.

The participants varied in their commitment to self-directed learning regarding the novel. Some felt strongly about the need to research the setting or the psychological aspects of the characters and their behaviors; others cared greatly about their own growth as writers. Some facilitated this growth by attending writing seminars and conferences, reading books and articles on writing, or studying published novels to deconstruct the craft. Some of the participants wrote quickly with little regard for verifying facts or seeking help from other authors to improve their skills; others took much more time with the details. The participants fell in various places along this continuum from a dedication to learning to complacency about their abilities in both the areas of content and writing craft. The self-directed learning of some of the authors appeared to be a characteristic, while, for others, learning activities were chosen ad hoc, when the writers recognized the need to ensure the quality of the novel. The two authors who chose to learn little in service of writing their first novel, learned much through the experience and reflection, and for subsequent projects became passionate self-directed learners in terms of both content and writing craft. For many of the authors, continuing their writing life, and investing time and energy into researching and creating new characters and settings for new manuscripts, brought them a sense of fulfillment and passion, regardless of the sales of their novels.

Discussion of Themes

While many variations existed in the authors' experiences of writing and publishing their first novel, four themes related to learning, motivation, and meaning were found. First, the novelists' orientation as subject or object in the creation of the novel influenced the writing

process. Second, the motivation that drove the authors came from the story itself, the writing process, or the goal of completing the novel manuscript for publication. Third, the authors found meaning in both the experience of writing and the sense of accomplishment in completing and publishing the manuscript. Fourth, the learning that occurred varied within the three main categories of researching the content of the novel, developing the writing craft, and learning from the experience and this self-directed learning involved a passion or perceived need. These themes are described in more detail below with support from the literature.

Influence of the Writer's Subject/Object Orientation

During the interviews, some of the participants described the writing process as though they received the story through inspiration and then allowed it to unfold or evolve. These novelists had a strong object orientation in relation to the creation of the story. Other participants described making deliberate decisions to create characters and plot points. These authors had a strong subject orientation in relation to their story. The novelists with a strong object orientation still took control of certain processes, such as making careful editing choices. The novelists with a strong subject orientation still retained some sense of mystery with regard to the creative process, such as describing their characters as being separate from themselves or alive. Still, the subject/object orientation of the author influenced the writing process. Those with strong object orientations rejected the use of outlines and wrote when the scenes came to their conscious minds. Some of them still chose certain times to edit or research, but refused to try to force the creative process. Those with strong subject orientations had clear routines or deadlines and created outlines in their head or on paper.

This variation in the writing process has already been noted by various authors. Many authors and writing coaches have recommended processes resembling those chosen by the

subject-oriented participants, such as setting a schedule to sit down to write in order to develop a habit (Bane, 2012; Cameron, 1998; Yolen, 2006). Some authors have constructed manuals to encourage writers to develop their novel in a set period of time, following a more stringent schedule, for example, Ray's (1994) book to guide a person to write the novel in a year of weekends or Domet's (2010) book that is designed to write a novel in three months. Both Ray's (1994) and Domet's (2010) books encourage writers to develop an outline before writing their manuscripts. On the other hand, some authors believe that writing a novel from an outline restricts their creativity. Instead, they embrace the writing process as described by the object-oriented participants. King (2000) is a prolific, best-selling author who rejects the method of creating an outline, although he does write daily when working on a manuscript. Brooks (2011) guided writers through a process of developing the concept, character, and story structure of their novel, while deciding for themselves whether they want to draft their story using an outline or work as 'pantsers,' 'by the seat of their pants.' Fry (2012), a writing coach, suggested that authors should take a self-inventory to discover their strengths and weaknesses as a writer before developing a process that will work best for them.

Many of the participants felt strongly about their way of writing. Caroline felt that following a plan "is maybe forcing it." She explained that, as a child, she could never create outlines for school:

> To save my life. This is not the way I think. So I believe some people maybe do think that way but I don't believe this is the most creative to write things, especially so far as when you're waiting for creative juices to flow.

She attributed this process of outlining to writer's block. "I think that is mainly a function of trying to force your thoughts in a certain direction."

Theresa's story came to her through meditative activities. Years earlier when she had attended a creative writing workshop and tried to write on a regular basis, she had found that it stifled her creativity. She worked better when she allowed the creativity to occur at its own pace, rather than forcing it. "If I'm not being creative right now, that's okay, and I don't have any pressures to force myself to be. But it will come when it comes." On the other hand, other participants valued more structure in their writing process. Sandy felt that she needed the 90-day goal to keep herself on track to complete the novel, and Brad found the daily schedule of writing gave him a sense of "you're trying to do a job now." This sense of purpose was important to him.

If the participants had utilized a different writing process, they likely would have missed what they valued most in the experience. Caroline's emphasis on being the object receiving story allowed her to delight in the unfolding of the experiences of her characters; she would have lost this aspect of the process if she had used a schedule and outline. While Sandy enjoyed writing about her characters, she needed to prove to herself that she could complete a manuscript. While she has made many changes in her process for writing her subsequent books, she still follows an outline and writes in order from Chapter 1 to Chapter 2. If the authors had altered their process of writing in the middle of the first novel manuscript, it is difficult to imagine that they would have succeeded in completing their novels. In the quest for a creative, finished product, the author needs to act as both subject and object in relation to his or her creation. Csikszentmihaly (1996) described this tenuous search for balance.

> What is so difficult about this process [of writing] is that one must keep the mind focused on two contradictory goals: not to miss the message whispered by the unconscious and at the same time force it into a suitable form. The first requires openness, the second

> critical judgment. If these two processes are not kept in a constantly shifting balance, the flow of writing dries up. (pp. 263–264)

Each author needs to find the shifting balance that works for him or her and this novel manuscript.

Motivation Found in the Story, Process, and Goal

Motivation can be seen as global, contextual, and situational (Vallerand, 2012). "The global level is the most general and refers to a person's personality or usual motivation to interact with the environment" (p. 46). During the interviews, many of the participants cited their personality as one of the reasons they achieved their goal of completing their manuscript. For example, one author said, "I've always been able to finish things I started. That's what my wife says anyway. I get a hold of it and I just don't let go until I'm done." When asked about having doubts about finishing the novel, many of the authors said things such as, "There was never any question in my mind that I was going to finish it." These statements coincide with Bandura's (1989) study on self-efficacy in which he stated "people's self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort they will exert in an endeavor and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles" (p. 1176). For these participants, once they made the decision to write the novel, they remained highly motivated to complete their goal.

According to Vallerand (2012), contextual motivation "represents specific life contexts, such as education (for students), leisure, and interpersonal relationships" (p. 46). Here the contextual motivation included the ability to see oneself as a writer. For some participants, the process of writing itself was a strong motivator. "Some people I think just have that drive, that desire, to write. I've never hated it. It's not something I've ever dreaded at all. It's part of my

motivation. I really enjoy doing it." There were several other factors that influenced the contextual motivation of the participants. Most of the participants had been avid readers throughout their lives and so developed a fascination with stories and writers. Several had kept journals or written poetry or short stories since they were children. Other participants developed a desire to write a novel later in life and included this goal as part of their bucket list. Theresa began writing more as an adult with memoir-style stories. She found the writing "was pleasant or I saw the benefits of it for my own psycho-spiritual release and so I kept up with it."

Several of the participants valued their own creativity. As one participant explained "I like to create and so the motivation was to create something and then get it recognized somewhere." Many of the participants were also encouraged when friends, family, or peers enjoyed reading their work. One participant described one component of his motivation as "the encouragement of the people who read some of my stuff who said, hey, keep going." Thus, the interest in reading, self-satisfaction in writing or creativity, or encouragement from others shaped a context wherein the process of writing itself was valued.

Vallerand (2012) asserted that situational motivation "is the most specific and refers to the here and now of motivation. It is the motivational state that an individual experiences when engaging in a specific activity at a given moment in time" (p. 46). In this study, situational motivation was most often related to the story itself, as this participant expressed,

> When I'm in a story I want to get it out of my head because I can't let it go, I can't do any other writing until I get it all out. And so that's my motivation. I always want to finish what I start if I can.

Another participant responded that her motivation was "to get these people to stop dancing on my brain. They were there, they were on top of me the whole time. I could not leave this one. It

just kept going and going. Energizer rabbit type of stuff." For two of the participants, the situational motivation was not directly related to the story itself, but rather to the circumstances that led them to decide to write the story. For Marjorie, the situational motivation occurred when she was asked by a publisher to write a proposal for a novel. For Clarissa, the situational motivation came as a result of deciding to embark on an adventure with her friend as the two wrote a mystery novel.

Vallerand (2012) explained that global motivation can influence contextual and situational motivations, and that repeated positive or negative experiences with situational and contextual motivation can change global motivation. Eric wrote and self-published three novels, and his disappointment in the lack of sales made him less inclined to put forth the effort needed to write another novel. Other participants were encouraged by the sense of accomplishment and the positive comments from family and friends. As a result, their motivation increased, driving them to write more novels.

While Vallerand (2012) organized motivation into the three vertical levels of global, contextual, and situational, the categories of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are also important in this study. In self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan (2008) found that autonomy (i.e., intrinsic motivation and successfully internalized extrinsic motivation) is critical to pursuing goals. This autonomous motivation was expressed by the participants, especially concerning their continued interest and commitment to writing novels. Though publication was important as a way to finalize her novel, Sandy explained, "I'm not looking for great success in writing. I'm looking for fun and to help people along the way and to entertain my friends which they really like the books I've written." Caroline was motivated to discover what her characters would do and found that writing the novel involved constant discovery. "Give yourself a chance to

actually benefit from this instead of making it a job. Make it be fun." This autonomy is an important component not only for motivation, but also for meaning the participants derived from writing and publishing their first novel, which is discussed in the next section.

Meaning Found in Experience and Accomplishment

Both self-directed and self-regulated learning theories include a component of personal meaning in the motivation (Garrison, 1997; McCombs, 2001). In this study, the participants found meaning in the process of writing, regardless of whether they chose to allow the story to unfold or whether they managed the development of the story through schedules and outlines. Many of the participants discussed the importance of creativity, "You know being creative has always been important to me." Some viewed that creativity as being similar to a muse: "I believe in these little guys in the back, the subconscious is figuring things out, relationships, and I just leave it to them to figure it out and the next day it works." Others related creativity to their own efforts and abilities: "I have always had a very vivid imagination. I could always tell stories extemporaneously, just off the top of my head," and viewed challenges to the writing as "a problem-solving thing and not a block of I can't think of anything to write."

Either way, the process of writing held meaning for the participants, as they spoke of the relationships they developed with their characters. "You know when you get into [writing] a book, you're almost a part of it. These people are almost alive to you. That's the fun of it." While the experience of writing was meaningful, so was the sense that it "was very satisfying in terms of being able to turn out a finished product that I think fairly describes their personalities, their passions, their heartache." This sense of accomplishment helped them to "learn a lot about myself and what makes me happy and that I can actually do something if I set my mind to it."

Writing a novel also gave a sense of purpose to some of the participants who no longer had an occupation. In a study conducted by Lawton et al. (2002) on the personal projects of older adults, the researchers inferred "that the more complex projects require greater resources because indulging them carries greater psychological and physical challenge; in turn, the benefits of enhancing positive well-being are correspondingly greater if the projects are successfully pursued" (p. 546).

In this study, three of the participants began writing after retirement, and the novels gave them a sense of purpose. Brad, the retired businessman in his 80s, explained that he had tried joining some retired men to socialize at restaurants, but he had found that they just wanted to talk about their accomplishments in the past; this was not for him. For him, the meaning of writing a novel "meant to me that even though I am older, that I can still be creative and contribute something that will hopefully last through the years."

Lessons Learned

From the study, three areas of possible learning became clear: researching the content for the novel, developing the writing craft, and learning through the experience of writing and publishing that first novel. The authors displayed great variety in their attention to these three areas. Some authors based their novels so much on their own first-hand experiences and based the characters on themselves and people they knew that they did not feel the need to do much additional research. Others immersed themselves in studying the personalities of their characters or the setting of the novel, developing home libraries of books, consulting online sources, and even talking to experts, as Brad did. Most of the participants fell somewhere in the middle of this spectrum.

When it came to developing their craft as writers, some participants believed that they already knew how to write a novel, as many of them were avid readers or had some background in writing. Others consulted a few books or articles. A few of them joined critique groups or attended conferences and dedicated themselves to becoming better writers. John, who had a college degree in engineering, believed his attendance at writing conferences was the equivalent of an associate's degree.

Knowles et al. (2012) compared the ideas of Knowles's andragogical model with self-directed learning and found an important component of both is that adults become ready to learn when they finally see that need. The authors who were somewhere in the middle of the continuum of researching the content and developing their writing craft through concentrated learning seemed to stay close to where they were on that continuum following the completion of their first published novel. At least, they did not mention any major changes or learning from the experience of writing and publishing that first novel, other than the knowledge that they knew they could complete what they started and write an entire novel. The authors who recounted the most experiences of self-directed learning with regard to that first published novel continued to put the same amount of effort, energy, and interest into the task for subsequent novels. They enjoyed the process of learning and seemed to draw passion from both the learning itself and their writing project.

In Gouthro's (2014a, 2014b) study on published authors, lifelong learning, and citizenship, she found that engaging in self-directed learning was a strong component of the participants. The authors in Gouthro's study had published traditionally and were seen as successful, even if not all of them received great financial compensation. Many of them indicated a path of learning that took place over time, as they learned their craft and developed

into better writers. This study focused on authors who had written and published at least one novel, and none of them had wide readerships. Most chose to self-publish; self-published participants did not seem to be a part of Gouthro's (2014a, 2014b) study, although she did discuss the implications of self-publication for changing the criteria of who gets to be a writer (2014a). The participants of this current study succeeded in their own eyes, but not necessarily in the eyes of the wider public. On reflection, many of the participants described a path of learning as they developed their craft. They acknowledged mistakes they made in the first novel which they corrected in subsequent writing. Some of the participants embraced an apprenticeship in which they learned from other writers that they met at conferences or in critique groups even if they did not see the need to learn in the beginning. They now dedicated themselves to growing as writers even if in the process of writing that first novel, they had a narrower focus of finishing the novel in 90 days or as quickly as possible.

In this study, the major change in terms of learning experience came from the two authors, Sandy and Molly, who described the least amount of self-directed learning for that first novel. However, after they had their manuscript self-published and had some time and space away from their novel to review their work, they finally saw a need to learn more about the settings and characters of their novels and to learn from the writing community at conferences and classes and from reading books on writing. These two not only found the need, but also developed the interest in self-directed learning in terms of both researching the content of their novels and improving their writing craft.

Schunk (2001) identified self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction as components of the social cognitive perspectives of self-regulated learning. For Molly and Sandy, in the midst of writing their novels, either they could not separate themselves from their

work enough for self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction, or the goal of completing that first novel was too important for them to stop to assess their work along the way. Both described a fast pace of writing. Neither slowed down enough to get much space from the manuscript before beginning the process of editing, which they both described as a quick, intense experience with little time to pause to reflect on the quality of their performance.

This pause came only after their disappointment in their self-publishing experiences. Sandy first believed that her publishing company was a traditional one and only later realized that it was "a scam." Molly believed that the role of the self-publishing company was to fix all of the mistakes of the author, and she "trusted them." With distance from the project, they began the self-reflection and self-observation process by realizing that they wrote too quickly, forsaking the quality. Here, they began the self-judgment of comparing their "present performance with one's goal" (Schunk, 2001, p. 131). The first goal—of finishing what they had started—had been reached, and now they wanted to learn how to write better. From this point on, both participants became much more self-directed in their learning to write a better novel.

Their self-reaction—their feelings about their accomplishment—was mixed. There was disappointment with the publishing experience, acknowledgement that the novel as it was currently written was not good enough for traditional publication, and pride and joy in their accomplishment of writing an entire novel. Molly pointed out, "There are certain things I did in this book, I'm not doing in this book. You know, lesson learned." Sandy explained,

> I don't think any writer is ever really done with a story. I think it's you change and grow and look back at the story and think, wow, I could have done that better. Because you change. You grow as a writer every year, I think.

Another finding of the research related specifically to the practice of self-publishing. Traditionally, a writer went through an agent who then found a publisher for the novel. Along this path, there are many possibilities for rejection, and many authors give up. However, self-publishing allows writers to bypass this rejection and to ensure that the manuscript will be published. The author pays to have the book bound, or, with current technologies, authors can submit their manuscript and the self-publishers will print on demand. With this practice, the self-published participants of this study either did most of the work themselves, accepting only free or nearly free services. Many created their own cover, edited their own manuscript or asked friends to help, and marketed the novel on their own. Others chose to purchase marketing and editing services from the self-publisher. Most of the self-published authors seemed to understand what they were buying, and, while they might have wished for more sales, did not have anything negative to say about the company.

Molly stood out of all the self-published authors because she had had so many frustrations with the company, returned to them for a total of three self-published books so far, and "literally gone into bankruptcy" by purchasing marketing plans for her later novels. She sounded bitter and angry in the interviews when she talked about how she "trusted them. They were the publisher." She went on to explain that she would ask questions about her novel and come away believing that they had not even read it; yet, she continued to listen to them enough to purchase more plans. Even during the interviews, she vacillated between saying that she might try a new self-publisher or search for an agent, but she never said that she would definitely not return to this self-publishing company.

In Garrison's (1997) comprehensive model of self-directed learning, self-monitoring is one of the three components. This involves finding a way to integrate external feedback with

internal feedback, listening to feedback from others, and making judgments about whether or not to accept that feedback. Molly has not seemed to be able to find a way to do this when it comes to her decisions about self-publishing. She never took full responsibility as the author of the novel for ensuring its quality. Instead, she handed the manuscript off to the self-publishing company for them to fix the problems. At the same time, she was disappointed with her interactions with the employees there, "When I asked them what's wrong with it? What do you think is wrong with it? Should I change it? They can't answer me because they never even bothered to read the book. They published what I sent them."

When an author is going to choose to self-publish, he or she bypasses the traditional gatekeepers of the publishing world and pays for the services of a for-profit company. While there are some quality self-published novels, self-publishing companies are still widely believed to accept anything for publication if the author pays for it. They often earn their money, not from sales of books, but from the money the author spends, which is why they are sometimes called vanity presses (Hadro, 2013).

When an author chooses to self-publish, he or she needs to think about the reason for publishing, research the companies, and determine how much money he or she is willing to spend on services. Furthermore, the author should develop a plan to find external feedback, reflect on how to integrate that feedback with internal feedback, and accept primary responsibility for the quality of the novel, in order to avoid the disappointments of an author like Molly.

Recommendations for Practice (Authors)

Many people have a desire to write a novel manuscript and to have it published. Many dream of financial success. This happens for some, but will not happen for every person who

writes a full-length novel manuscript. Lawrence Block (1981/1994) justified his role of giving advice to writers in a newspaper column, knowing that most of his readers would probably never publish traditionally or have financial success through their writing efforts. Instead, he suggested that the act of writing has other value besides commercial or literary success.

> I would certainly hope, though, that Sunday writers can avoid equating failure to publish with failure as a writer. If you are gaining satisfaction from writing, if you are exercising and improving your talent, if you are committing to paper your special feelings and perceptions, then you can damn well call yourself a success. Whether you wind up in print, whether you ever see money for your efforts, is and ought to be incidental. (p. 49)

Perhaps the person reading this has the talent and will find the determination to develop that talent, to write, to revise many drafts of many manuscripts, to pursue publishing, and to enjoy financial success. However, of the nine participants in this study, only one made part of her living from her novels. If a person has characters talking or has a twisting plot to unfold, then writing a novel manuscript can lead to great satisfaction, as described in this study. However, it would be helpful to understand the purposes of writing the novel beyond the hope of earning money.

In the course of determining one's purposes for writing the novel, it would be helpful to determine first whether the experience of writing or the goal of completing the manuscript is the priority. To this end, the writer might consider whether he or she would prefer to be the subject, creating the story through outlines and schedules and driving the story to its completion in a given period of time, or if he or she would rather allow the story to unfold or evolve. Between these two orientations lie many variations. The writer could explore different processes to find which one works. Several of the authors interviewed made adjustments from one manuscript to

the next. When analyzing the data from the participants, their motivation to write their novel was related to the value they placed on the experience of writing and on the goal of completing the manuscript. Sandy chose to write her novel in 90 days because she felt that she needed that focus, whereas Caroline placed greater value on allowing the story to unfold, and so she could patiently wait the three years until her story was fully revealed to her. In light of this, understanding one's priorities and choosing a process that honors them may help the writer to maintain the motivation necessary to complete the novel.

Also important is determining the main purpose of writing this particular novel. Is it therapeutic to write—a retelling of one's own life through fictional accounts? Is writing a book on a bucket list? Or perhaps this one plot is vivid or the characters are talking and the person is moved to write this story. If the purpose is to write therapeutically or to share the novel with friends, then perhaps just writing is the best thing to do. If the writer believes that he or she has a talent that can be developed into writing and publishing a book that strangers will want to buy, then he or she ought to consider developing a self-directed learning plan. Published novels often involve many revisions and many years of developing the writer's craft before achieving publishing success (DeSalvo, 2014). Yet, many novice writers seem to think that a few months' effort and one or two revisions are enough to produce a quality novel, as did many of the participants in this study. DeSalvo (2014) suggested that writers consider the areas they want to improve and then create a plan for this apprenticeship.

The details inside the novel are also important. In this study, Sandy and Molly did little research, relying on their imagination to fill in the blanks for their first novel. They later realized that researching the content is important. McAleer (2008) interviewed a number of published

authors in order to discover the habits related to their success. Many described the need to research their novels carefully. Patricia Briggs told McAleer (2008),

> The little details matter a lot—so no guessing. When you are writing fiction . . . it is important to make your world utterly believable. The minute you get a detail wrong, it pulls your reader out of your story. (p. 61)

The author should consider areas of research needed to make the story more believable. This may involve watching documentaries, reading books or articles, visiting historical sites, and speaking to experts, if possible, as Brad did.

Finally, another area to research is the publication process. Writers should take time to understand the differences between self-publishing and vanity presses and the differences among traditional publishing companies. Before contacting these companies, and certainly before signing contracts, authors should research the companies. This involves more than just viewing their website. This involves finding the titles of other books they have published and reviewing one or two of these books in order to assess quality of the publications. They should read anything written about the company, including author complaints or lawsuits (Hadro, 2013).

Choosing to create a self-directed learning plan is part of the self-management process described by Garrison (1997). Another important component is self-monitoring. This is especially important for those authors who choose to self-publish. Before choosing to self-publish, authors should consider their reasons. In this study, the reasons varied, and some of the reasons for self-publishing were more personal. As a result, self-publishing made sense for these participants, and they were not disappointed by their choice. If the author is hoping to attract an audience beyond family and friends, he or she should perhaps find a group of writers with which to discuss the available options. This way, the writer can make an informed decision about

whether to search for an agent via the traditional route, whether to practice writing with a few more manuscripts before attempting publication, or whether to learn the responsibilities involved in the self-publication process. There are many online writing communities and conferences, and the experiences of these other authors may be helpful.

Once the decision has been made to self-publish, and the companies have been researched, the writer needs to understand that he or she has rejected having gatekeepers in the form of agents and traditional publishing companies. These gatekeepers help to determine the quality of the product (Csikszentmihaly, 1996), and, in self-publishing, writers must accept responsibility for the quality of their own work. Learning to listen to criticism and discerning what suggestions to accept is an integral part of self-monitoring. The writer, as artist, has the vision, but what good is this if the readers do not enjoy the work? So, it is important to find a way to integrate that external feedback with one's internal feedback (Garrison, 1997).

Molly did not like accepting criticism about her first novel, but learned to embrace it. She was able to improve her writing with later novels and discovered that practice can help, as can learning to read books with the writer's eye, as several of the participants described. With self-publishing, it is important to develop self-monitoring not only regarding the quality of the novel, but also regarding the self-publishing plan. The author needs to know how much money he or she is willing to spend for services, determine which services to purchase, and determine a marketing plan. While this involves monitoring the quality of others' work (the self-publishing company), it also means returning again and again to the author's own work to assess the quality of the work and the reception it has received from others. As the author develops the writing craft and the ability to self-monitor, his or her opinion of earlier work may change.

As Block (1981/1994) described in the quote earlier, there are many worthy reasons to continue writing novel manuscripts, even if financial success is never attained. It is up to the individual writer to reflect on his or her goals and values in order to decide if the time and energy, and perhaps money, invested is worth the pursuit.

Recommendations for Practice (Educators)

For educators of writers—whether they are leading writing seminars or offering coaching services—helping prospective novelists to uncover their purposes in writing is an important first step in helping them to achieve success on their own terms. As was uncovered in this study, not all novelists have the same goals for their published work. While many may desire some kind of literary or commercial success, not all do. Furthermore, the extent to which this extrinsic reward holds value varies from one novelist to the next. One early exercise could be journaling or some other reflective activity so that the aspiring writer understands which goals he or she most values before pursuing the intense work of creating a novel manuscript.

Once the prospective novelists have reflected on their goals, the educator could facilitate other exercises for writers to research the advantages and disadvantages of various publishing formats, especially traditional versus self-publishing companies. The educator should emphasize the need for the writer to take responsibility for the quality of the novel, especially if he or she chooses to self-publish.

The educator should also discuss the three components of Garrison's (1997) comprehensive model of self-directed learning: self-management, motivation, which is enhanced by personal meaning, and self-monitoring. To grow as a writer, self-monitoring is a skill that must be developed. For those authors choosing to self-publish, self-monitoring is especially critical. The ability to self-monitor one's writing skills may be enhanced through the practice of

listening openly to feedback about one's work and by taking time away from the work, as several of the study participants discovered. In addition, writers should be encouraged to compare their work with published novels that they enjoy reading. If they read the published novels carefully, when they look back at their own work, they might realize that they have work to do before publication. This process will improve their ability to self-monitor. However, the educator should help prospective authors to understand that these published novels are the product of numerous drafts, so that they do not become too discouraged. DeSalvo (2014) shares various drafts of published work with her students in order to teach them how to become better memoir writers. This helps them to realize that work from other authors they respect also involved revisions, and they will be better able to accept that they need to revise their own work.

The educator may also discuss with the students their subject/object orientation with respect to their novel. If some authors are struggling with their writing, they may explore which orientation works best for them. Some may require a more focused schedule, while others may enjoy the process more by allowing the story to unfold.

Although this study involved published novelist, the suggestions made for educators of novelists could work for a variety of writers. In addition, Garrison's (1997) three components of the comprehensive model for self-directed learning are important for any adult undertaking a large personal project. Self-management and motivation will help the person to achieve his or her goals, while the ability to self-monitor will help the person to understand if these are the goals desired.

Recommended Further Study

This study focused on the experiences of authors and their first published novel, and the meaning they placed on those experiences. However, none of the authors had experienced

significant financial success from their published novels. No attempt to judge the quality of the novels was made here. This study focused on the meaning and significance for the participants. However, more commercially successful published authors may have very different things to say about their experiences with writing. As such, researchers could examine novelists who earn a living through the sales of their novels in order to investigate the type of learning they do, the sources of their motivation, and the meaning they place on the writing process. While the object-oriented style worked for three of the participants in this study, none of them needed to produce novels to meet deadlines. Professional novelists may have an object-oriented style, but need to modify their writing practices to meet deadlines. Another study might include a cross-section of novelists with varying degrees of success in terms of earning money from their work and completing most of the manuscripts they start writing. This might show differences in the themes between those who succeed financially, those who succeed at a personal level by completing their work to their satisfaction, and those who do not feel that they are succeeding on either level.

More research could be done on self-published novelists. Each of the self-published novelists in this study had different purposes for choosing to self-publish: from ease or quickness of publishing, to protecting one's vision of the quality of the novel, to limiting access to the novel to family and friends. Additional studies could explore whether there are additional reasons for this choice, and if there is a relationship between the reason for choosing self-publishing and the level of satisfaction associated with the experience.

Three of the authors were retired, and writing the novel gave them a sense of purpose. Lawton et al. (2002) studied personal projects among older adults and believed that more complex projects correlated to a stronger sense of well-being. A study focusing only on retired

or perhaps disabled writers could help to explore the dynamics of purpose, complex projects, and well-being.

This study focused on authors writing novels, but there are so many other adults who have complex personal projects that they pursue. Researchers could expand the initial study to discover the self-directed learning, motivation, and meaning other adults experience when they pursue large, personally meaningful goals, such as opening an art show, advocating for a cause, or starting an entrepreneurial business, in order to discover the extent to which the themes are similar. Such a study would help to expand the applicability of these findings, and develop a better understanding of how adults learn and find the motivation to pursue large goals besides writing novels.

Future Research

After completing this study, I still believe that there is much to uncover about the learning habits and attitudes of writers, and the motivation and meaning that drives them to write. For this study, I interviewed nine published novelists in middle or later adulthood at the time of the writing and publishing of their novel. One author was 40 when she first wrote the novel manuscript, and one author was 80 when he published his novel. Although I chose not to ask about other demographics, I learned that one of the participants was receiving disability benefits and had a fixed income. These circumstances influenced her decision to only choose free services from the self-publishing company, although she still spent money to research her novel and buy copies. Another participant had owned a business prior to retirement and had the means to travel extensively for research and to attend conferences; he chose to pay for editing and self-publishing services. Most had professional careers and seemed to have moderate incomes, although a few mentioned some financial struggles. However, all of the participants

were white. I would like to expand this study to include younger participants, participants from other ethnic backgrounds, and writers engaged in other writing activities, including memoirists, non-fiction writers, and poets. I think by including these other participants, I will be able to discover various nuances with respect to the themes. I am especially interested in discovering whether the subject/object orientation continues to play a role in writing practice if I expand the study to other types of writers.

During the research, I was surprised to learn that the participants had very different interpretations of writer's block. It seemed that this influenced the writers' strategies for dealing with difficulties in writing. I would like to study these interpretations and strategies for writer's block further. I would also like to conduct a study of academic writers in order to find out their interpretations and strategies. For this study, I would use a phenomenological approach in which the participants—faculty and college students—would be asked to write a Lived Experience Description (Vagle, 2014). They would write an account of their experiences with writer's block and describe their behaviors in either finding strategies around that writer's block or giving up. Of the larger sample completing the Lived Experience Description, I would invite five to eight to participate in an interview in which they would describe their perceptions and experiences with writer's block and their strategies, whether successful or not.

In the early analysis of the findings of this study, I wrote many pages that were not included in the final dissertation in which I discussed the existential themes of the writer. In the revised version, only the subject/object orientation of the writer's lived experience in relation to writing the novel was given full attention. The participants differed in discussing the importance of time, space, other aspects of body, and relationships to others. For some writers, space was very important, while others hardly paid attention to it. As a result, space did not become a

theme in this study. However, I would like to conduct a further study of the writing practice (not just regarding the first published novel) in order to investigate how writers experience these existential themes and how important they are to the motivation and meaning of the writer. I would include interviews and personality tests in order to explore whether the existentials that make a valuable and successful writing experience for the authors of one personality type would create a frustrating and unsuccessful writing experience for authors of another type of personality. In a meta-analysis of personality and performance motivation, Judge and Ilies (2002) found that of the Big Five Personality Traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness), conscientiousness was positively related and neuroticism was negatively related to performance motivation. However, how would these personality traits relate to the accomplishments of the novelist who hears the characters talking and has to write it down? Perhaps certain personality types have better success with more rigid schedules, while other personality types have better success as 'pantsers' who write their novels 'by the seat of their pants.' If there does turn out to be a correlation between personality types and satisfying, successful writing experiences, and, conversely, if there is a correlation between personality types and unsatisfying, unsuccessful writing experiences, then it would be important for writers to understand their personality type and the type of writing environment most likely to be conducive to their success.

Finally, no matter how much I probed, the participants in my study did not seem to have self-doubt or consider giving up during the writing of their manuscript, which was curious because many published authors discuss the obstacles to motivation and how common it is to want to give up during the writing of a manuscript (Bane, 2012; Ueland, 1938/1987). I reflected on this and recalled recently reading that writers should keep a process journal for each work

(DeSalvo, 2014). DeSalvo (2014), who writes memoirs and teaches others, described how she learned to keep a process journal so that she would have an accurate representation of "our work patterns, our feelings about our work, our responses to ourselves as writers, and our strategies for dealing with difficulties and challenges" (p. 70). When DeSalvo (2014) is struggling to write a manuscript, she returns to the process journal of an older work:

> I learn that I habitually think about abandoning a project just before I see how the book should be organized; this helps me re-engage with my current work more confidently. . . . I'm surprised to learn that the hard days outnumbered wonderful days, giving me courage to return to work when it's difficult. (p. 70)

I wonder if the success that the participants felt because they had completed and published those manuscripts made them forget the struggles that they had encountered in the midst of the work, as DeSalvo (2014) discovered about herself. In the future, I would like to conduct a study on motivation in which I interview authors in the midst of writing a manuscript, asking them to keep journals for one or two months. Then, I would interview them a year later and perhaps two years later to learn what happened to the manuscript. I believe that the participants might have more to say about how they deal with such struggles when they are immediately faced with them. It will also be helpful to compare these early interviews with the long-term results.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to discover how people in middle or later adulthood pursued the goal of writing and publishing a first novel. Interviews with nine participants were conducted to answer the phenomenological questions of the meaning the participants placed on this experience and how that meaning influenced their self-directed learning and motivation to accomplish the goal of a completed and published novel. Through analysis, four themes

emerged in response to the research questions. The authors had a subject or object orientation to their story, which influenced their decisions as to how to pursue the writing of their novel. If they were more subject-oriented, they generally created outlines and followed schedules, or adhered to deadlines in order to accomplish their goal. If they were more object-oriented, they avoided outlines and rigid schedules and instead trusted the subconscious process of creativity. The motivation that drove the authors to complete their novels could be traced to the story itself, the process of writing, which was closely related to the subject/object orientation of the author, and the goal of completing and publishing the novel manuscript. The meaning was found in the experience of writing itself and in the sense of accomplishment in completing and publishing their novel manuscript. The learning that each of the authors did varied greatly and fell into three general categories: researching the content of the book, developing the writing craft, and learning through the experience of having written and published a novel and the self-directed learning of the participants involved a passion or a perceived need for learning.

In conducting this study, I hoped to find the answers on the motivation and learning necessary to succeed in the goal of writing a novel. I sought to help other prospective novelists to better understand how they could succeed in completing and publishing their manuscripts, and to give adult educators ideas to help their students pursue their own dreams, whether writing and publishing a novel or opening a business. What I found is that the practice of writing itself is deeply intertwined with the meaning and motivation that these particular writers described when retelling their experiences. Writing practices varied greatly among the participants. Motivation and meaning also overlapped, as both were crucial to the process of writing and the sense of accomplishment the participants felt in completing and publishing the manuscript. The importance of meaning for motivation has been discussed by other researchers (e.g., Garrison,

1997; Lawton et al., 2002; McGregor & Little, 1998). The participants in this study reaffirmed the importance of personal meaning for motivation, and this meaning was found both in the process and completion of the work.

The participants in this study did not discuss any challenges to their motivation that caused them to consider giving up. While some recalled a few motivational problems, none of them discussed them in detail, despite probing questions. In order to help other prospective novelists who are struggling, and other adults pursuing complex personal projects comparable to writing a novel manuscript, more data needs to be gathered at the stage in the project when the person is more likely to remember the difficulties (DeSalvo, 2014).

The participants in this study also varied greatly in the types of self-directed learning they pursued when writing and publishing their first novel. Some of them drew on past experiences or felt that they already knew what was necessary for them to write well and discuss the content. Some put very little effort into learning. A few had a passion for developing the writing craft or learning about the world their characters inhabited. Because none of these participants enjoyed much commercial success and no attempt was made to judge the quality of their work, I am not qualified to determine whether or not the participants did need to learn more, beyond what was self-reported. The two participants who did the least learning for the first novel decided in retrospect that they should have put more effort into learning and later became passionate self-directed learners for subsequent novels.

For the person hoping to write a novel, an important question to ask oneself is what is the main purpose of writing the novel? If the reason is mostly personal in nature—to do something therapeutic, fun, or purposeful—then perhaps the person is free to learn as much or as little as he or she desires. If the writer desires to build on the craft and to strive to achieve professional

success, then this person should spend some time assessing his or her current knowledge in terms of the desired goals in order to determine what needs to be learned.

What I learned during this study was that when both the experience and the goal of completion fuel motivation and meaning, success can be found. I learned that people's reasons for choosing to write novels are more varied than I imagined and that it is possible to feel great pride in one's accomplishment, yet still feel disappointment in the outcomes. I learned that even after a novel has been published, the author may consider it complete, but still not be ready to let it go. I learned that the meaning is personal and the accomplishment is real for the person who has had the experience, even if it never fits someone else's idea of success.

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APPENDIX A

Preliminary Questionnaire

1. How old were you while you were writing your first published novel?
2. How old were you when your first novel was published?
3. When did you first realize you wanted to write a novel?
4. What was your experience with writing prior to beginning the writing of this first published novel?

APPENDIX B

Semi-structured Interview Guide

1. Describe your experience writing your first published novel.
2. What meaning do you place on this experience?
3. Describe your experience during the publishing process for this novel.
4. What meaning did you place on getting this novel published?
5. Describe your learning process while writing and publishing this novel.
6. Describe your experience with motivation and challenges during the process of writing and publishing this novel.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

Title: Pursing a Dream at Midlife: Self-Direction of Writers with Their First Published Novel

Principal Investigator:

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Department of Educational Studies, Teachers College, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306

Introduction:

You are invited to volunteer to participate in a research study that is the basis of my dissertation. This consent forms provides you with information you will need to determine whether or not to participate. This study is governed by the Institutional Review Board of Ball State University. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this consent form which states that you have read the overview of the study, that any questions you have about this study have been answered, and that you agree to participate. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Study Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore the essence of writing a first published novel by persons who were in middle or later adulthood at the time of the publication of this first novel. The expected duration of your participation will be within 12 weeks. Date received from this research will be shared with the participants, faculty at Ball State University, submitted to professional journals for publication and presented at professional conferences. You qualify as a possible participant for this study: 1) because you wrote a novel; and 2) you published a novel for the first time when you were at least 33 years old.

Study Procedures: If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to provide information about your experience with writing and publishing your first published novel.

1. All participants will be asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire that will take approximately 10–30 minutes to complete.
2. Within 6 weeks from the initial contact, you will participate in a semi-structured interview which will last 60–90 minutes during which time you will reflect on your experience with your first published novel.
3. Within 12 weeks from the initial contact, you will participate in a follow-up interview to clarify and further reflect on your experience of writing and publishing this novel and to discuss with me, the interviewer, the possible meanings and themes I found while analyzing your first interview so you can contribute your own insights into possible meanings and themes. This second interview will last 30–60 minutes.

Study Risks:

Your participation in this study involves no physical or psychological risks.

Study Benefits:

The benefit of this study is to participate in research to better understand how people direct their learning and motivation to achieve personally meaningful goals, particularly writing and publishing a novel.

Costs to the Participant:

There are no costs to participating in this research study.

Compensation:

There is no monetary compensation for participants in this study.

Confidentiality:

If you consent to participate in this study, your questionnaires and transcriptions of your interview will be kept confidential. Besides the researcher, Jennifer Murray, the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Michelle Glowacki-Dudka will have access to review the data during analysis. The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and on a password protected computer kept in the primary researcher's residence for three years and may be referenced in future research studies involving self-direction and motivation of adults towards their goals.

Voluntary Participation in, and Withdrawal from, the Study:

The decision to participate in this research study is entirely up to you. Participation is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Signing this form does not waive any of your legal rights.

Contacts:

If you have any questions about the study, please ask, and the primary investigator will do her best to answer them. If you have additional questions in the future, please contact the primary researcher using the contact information listed on the first page of this consent form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity at Ball State University (765-285-5052).

Statement of Consent:

I have reviewed the study outlined above. I have had questions about the study answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. Signing this form does not waive any of my legal rights. By signing below, I am indicating that this form has been explained to me, that I understand it, and any questions have been answered. I am indicating that I understand the ways the data will

be collected and utilized. I understand that my privacy will be protected. By signing this form, I am agreeing to participate in this research study.

I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I HAVE READ THE ABOVE EXPLANATION OF THIS STUDY, THAT ALL MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN SATISFACTORILY ANSWERED, AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Signature of Study Participant

Printed Name of Study Participant

Date

I CERTIFY THAT I HAVE EXPLAINED FULLY TO THE ABOVE PARTICIPANT THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF PROCEDURES AND THE POSSIBLE RISK AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date